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THE HIDDEN SIN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE HIDDEN SIN.

CHAPTER I.

A MEETING IN THE CITY.

IN the forenoon of the 25th of December, 1816, I was sitting in one of those high narrow boxes partitioned off the public room of the old Greek Coffee-house, which then stood in Finsbury Pavement, reading the morning paper, and feeling that I was a stranger in London, having arrived the day before by the American ship 'Franklin,' from Baltimore. The coffee-house was empty, the streets were dreary, with a dull, heavy fog and shut-up shops, everybody was at church or at home getting ready for their Christmas dinner; but while I sat there, seeing that there was no news, and wondering how I should spend the day, two men in earnest conver-

sation entered, and took possession of the box next to mine. I knew they did not see me, and had come there for private talk ; but I saw them. One was a tall, grey-haired man, with a large frame, a slight stoop, a sober, intelligent look, and features of the Scottish type, but somewhat softened, like the faces one meets with in the north of Ireland. The other was at least twenty years younger, a smaller man, thin, dark, and disagreeable looking ; one could not say why, for he had good black eyes and hair, features of the Jewish mould, and an appearance of wiry strength, but somehow there was an expression in his face of being on the look-out to do somebody mischief, and having accounts to settle with all mankind. He was listening in a friendly manner, however, to the elder—I was going to say gentleman, but that term did not exactly apply to either of the pair ; though respectably dressed, they were both unmistakably clerks, fresh from mercantile offices, and in their holiday trim.

“It is just sixteen years ago,” said the senior, when coffee had been ordered and the waiter dismissed ; “it happened the very year that Ireland lost her parliament, the last of the century, and much about this season. I re-

member it well, I was in La Touche's employment, the only clerk he ever kept, so I ought to know a good deal about the family."

"No doubt you do," said his companion. "Did they live in Ireland?"

"In Armagh, my native place," said the elder man—he spoke with a semi-Scottish accent wonderfully suited to his look; "a town in the north, not large but very ancient, and of greater note in old times than it is now. They say Saint Patrick built his first Christian church there on the sight of the present cathedral. They show the hermitage in which he lived and died, a low hut in the churchyard, overgrown with ivy, and the old people have fine tales about a college which stood hard by, and students flocking to it from France and Spain, when learning was everywhere scarce but in Ireland. I suppose they were partly true, like most fine stories. There was nothing of the kind in my time, nor for hundreds of years before it; but Armagh was a bishop's see, the chief town of one of the Ulster counties, foremost in the linen trade, and on the coach road between Dublin and Belfast. It had a good market for corn and flax, linen cloth, and yarn. The country round was all gentlemen's seats and comfortable farms. There

were hand-loom and spinning-wheels going in every house, there were bleach greens beside every stream, with webs spread out and whitening in the summer sun, and there was a deal of safe steady business done in the town. Small and old as it was, some people made their fortunes there; we did not expect such great gatherings as they do England, but we had our rich men, and La Touche was counted one of them. I have heard my father say that his father came from Dublin and set up the first bank that ever was known in Armagh, the year the new style came in."

"Was the family French?" said his listener. What a hard metallic tone his voice had; how low, and yet how clear it was!

"I suppose it must have been, from the name, though it is a known one in Dublin. I am not sure that the race has not relations there to this day, merchants and bankers like themselves, but on a far higher scale, and never familiar with them, no doubt the relationship was distant. However that might be, the Dublin house and the Armagh one did business together. Mr. La Touche, my employer, was a linen merchant and a banker, as his father had been before him. The old man had but two sons,

you see, one of them got the business, the other went to France to be educated for a priest, it was the only way of making priests at that time, and the La Touches were Roman Catholics. It was thought he should have got the parish, but whether there was any difference between him and his elder brother, as some people said, about Miss O'Neil, the Star of the North, they called her, whom the banker afterwards married, or whether he took another notion, nobody could tell; but the boy went out to Lower Canada as soon as his education was finished, and got an out-of-the-world parish among the French settlers there. So my master had the business all to himself; it was a good and a prosperous one when I came into his service five-and-thirty years ago.

"A weaver with a loom of his own was well to do, and a hand for fine spinning was a marriage portion not to be overlooked by small farmers and their sons. Sound profits were to be made by banking in those days; private banks were the only things to be found in country towns. La Touche was a shrewd man of business, but an honest one. I never knew a man who held his honour higher, or showed more of the gentleman in all his dealings. His

father had borne the same character before him, so had his grandfather and great grandfather among the Dublin people. They were all in the banking line, you see, and it was natural that the whole country should put confidence in him. His business was nothing to what the Dublin house did; nothing to what Mr. Forbes carries on here; but of its sort and size there was not a more respectable or flourishing concern in all Ireland than La Touche's Armagh Bank.

"All the saving farmers deposited their gatherings there, because the rate of interest was good, and everybody believed the Armagh Bank as safe as the Armagh Cathedral.

"I have said that, besides being a banker, La Touche was a linen merchant. That was the most genteel business in our country—quite above the reach of common people, on account of the skill and experience, not to speak of the capital, required to carry it on with any chance of success; but he had served an apprenticeship to it under his own father, and the bank enabled him to buy up half the webs brought to our markets sometimes, and do large transactions with the exporting men in Belfast.

"Everybody thought La Touche wealthy; and he should have been so, if his hands could

only have kept what they gathered ; but he was not the man to do that. A gentleman every inch of him, as they say in Ireland, with an open hand and open heart, ready to help, ready to spend, easy in his goings, and rather given to sport, keeping a good table and a liberal house—may be a wasteful one—never clear of company, tea and dancing, cards and supper, at least half the evenings in the week, with dozens of old followers coming at all hours to tell their distresses and get relieved.

“ When I became his clerk, Mr. La Touche had been nearly three years married to the Star of the North—they called Miss O’Neil that for her beauty. She was the handsomest woman in that side of Ulster, and came of a high family. They traced their descent from the Earls of Tyrone ; the castle and estate of Finmore had belonged to them, but the castle had been in ruins for nearly a hundred years, the estate was parted among strangers, and they had nothing but an old-fashioned thatched-roofed house, standing out among the meadows at the end of Church-lane, and a small income which was to die with the mother. She was a widow, with one son and a daughter ; but till her dying day she never allowed herself to be called anything

but madame, nor suffered anyone to sit down in her presence till they were bidden. When her son had to do something for his living, she shipped him off to America, for fear it should be known that one of the O'Neil's had come so low as to follow trade or business.

"La Touche had to show his pedigree, and prove himself descended from somebody as good as the Tyrones, before he got leave to marry her daughter. I suppose he did it to the old lady's satisfaction, for they were married. Such a wedding never was seen in Armagh. The poor people lived for a week on the leavings of the dinner; they got it all among them; and Mrs. La Touche was a fine woman, a pleasure to look at, and a pleasure to talk to; but to my knowledge she never did anything except read novels and see company. House, children, and servants, all were left to the care of Miss Livey, Miss Olivia was her state name, but she never got it—an aunt of La Touche's, who had always lived in the house, and never been married—whether on account of a very particular cast in both her eyes, or a temper of her own, the neighbours could not be certain. However, she took the whole charge, was first up in the morning, and last in bed at night,

blew them all sky-high when things went too far out of regulation ; and how they would have gone on without her, nobody could tell.

“ Beyond a doubt, Miss Livey had a temper, but it did not come on often ; and when matters were not quite against her mind, she was a good-humoured, kindly soul, charitable to the poor, hospitable to all comers, given to none of women’s vanities, always going about in the same old gown and cap Saturday and Sunday—maybe she thought there was no use in her dressing—and troublesome about nothing but the honour and glory of her family

“ Miss Livey had a complete account of their lineage, cut out of an old book and kept in her best pocket—I think it began with the King of France—and she always insisted that they had better blood than the O’Neils. Yet it was wonderful that she and the young madame, as we call Mrs. La Touche, never had an unfriendly word. The handsome, easy young lady gave her all her own way with the house, the children, and the servants ; it was Miss Livey’s pride to see her dressed in the newest fashions from Belfast, going to parties and having company at home, while she waited on her in a manner and managed everything ; and the

master, Mr. La Touche, I mean, knew his aunt's value, left all to her management, except just his business. The neighbours said he never expected the Star of the North to do anything but shine, and was as fond and proud of her to the last as he was the day they were married.


"He was a fine man himself, both in person and manner, and they kept a gay, pleasant house. It was called "The Bank;" his father had built it twice the size of any in the town; one side was the bank office, with a linen warehouse behind; the other was the dwelling-house, large and commodious for people in Armagh; and there was a garden in the rear long enough for a London street, with cherry-trees and roses, both red and white.

"I lived hard by, in Church-lane, with my father and mother, being their only son; but the Bank people were kind to me, when the business of the day was done, and the Bank and warehouse closed. You see I was clerk in them both. They asked me to stay among the best of their company, which was pleasant for a young man, and made my poor mother proud. All their friends knew me; all their children were fond of me. I was there while they were

coming and growing up, seven strong—a chain of girls with a boy at each end of it, as Miss Livey used to say. The top link was poor Raymond, the boy that disappeared so unaccountably, and ruined his father; he was learning to walk when I first came to the Bank. Then there were five girls, every one handsome like their mother. I need not go over their names; they are all on the family tombstone, except Rhoda, the youngest, next to Lucien, the last link of the chain, who is coming to your office and she lives on with Miss Livey.

“It is strange to remember all their young faces and young ways, that kept the house so lively, and sometimes bothered it, and think that they are all gone but two. Take them one and all, there was not a finer family in the country. The girls took after their mother: they had all her fair complexion and blue eyes, and, they say, her constitution, for the four eldest died of the ‘decay,’ as we say in Ireland, and it was known to run in the O’Neil family. The two boys were fairly divided between their parents. Lucien was the image of his father when I saw him last, and that was in his seventh year: he had the same brown complexion, hair and eyes nearly black, and face

inclining to be round and rosy. But Raymond was his mother's son, with her longer face, finely moulded features, blue eyes, jet-black hair, and complexion that seemed too fine for a boy. To look at him you would have thought he should have been a girl. There was a painter from Belfast who took his likeness for a picture of Kathleen, the lady who tempted St. Kekevin; but there was a firm look in Raymond's face when anything called up his courage—and he had as brave a heart and as high a spirit as any man in Ireland. Young as he was then, I never knew a better or a wiser boy; there was no mischief, no troublesomeness in him. At school he carried off all the prizes; at home he was helping in his father's business when other boys think only of tops and balls. If there were any harmless fun going on, Raymond was sure to be ringleader; if there were troubles or disputes, Raymond was smoothing matters and making peace. When Miss Livey was in the height of her tempers—when there was too much to do in the warehouse or the bank—when any of the children had got into a scrape—when any of the servants got into disgrace, as will happen in every family—when any of the poor neighbours were in hardships of troubles or any



sort, Raymond was always ready with a kind word and a helping hand. It was remarkable to hear the old women blessing him as he walked the streets, and to see how rich and poor smiled on the boy as he passed.

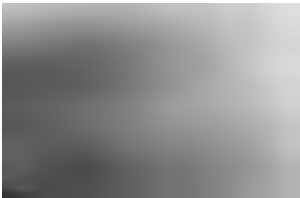
"His father and mother would not have parted with one of the seven for all the wealth in Europe; but Raymond was their heart's darling; and no wonder, for he promised to be the staff of their age.

"Before he was fourteen, his father could trust him with any secret of the concern—and what concern has not the like?—send him on any private business to Belfast, let him look over the books, and answer letters in his name.

"Raymond was so clever, so sensible, so prudent, one forgot that he was but a boy. His very growth was beyond the common, for at sixteen he looked like a tall, handsome young man of two-and-twenty; and I am sure the ladies were taking notice of him, for he handed them about and paid them compliments at dances and parties like the first gentleman in the land.

"'Haven't I cause to be thankful, Wilson?' the master would say to me; 'where is the man that has got such an elder son. He will carry

on the bank, and keep up the credit of the family; and if it's the Lord's will to call me before they are all settled, Raymond will be a head to the house, and a comfort to his mother.'"



CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

REASONS of my own so interested me in the narration to which I was accidentally a listener, that I did not stir nor move. The narrator, after a pause, during which he sipped his coffee, continued :—

“Things had been going on with great prosperity in the eyes of all the neighbours, high and low, for about seventeen years, counting from my coming to the bank. The La Touches were reckoned among the county gentry, and thought wise people as well as good. They had kept clear of all the troubles in '98 ; the Government never suspected the Armagh banker of disloyalty ; the United Men knew he was above informing, and thought he wished well to their cause. They had kept clear of party spirit, too, high as it runs in Ireland. The La Touches

had no bigotry, no uncharitableness. I have seen the Catholic dean, the Protestant rector, and the Presbyterian minister, all sitting together at their table; and whether it was a church, a chapel, or a meeting-house, that wanted subscriptions, Mr. La Touche came out just as handsomely. You may guess he and his family were well liked, and well wished, too; but, as I said before, he was both *bare* and busy.

“Nothing overreaching or selfish would the man do under any circumstances; but as the children grew up, and expenses increased upon him, every honest expedient and resource that he could think of was needful to pay his way and keep a fair show to the world. I was his only clerk, and, next to himself and Raymond, had the best knowledge of his affairs, for he liked and trusted me. Among so few hands things could be kept quiet; I don’t believe that anybody in Armagh had the smallest guess that he was not laying by money for the girls, though every season brought us some push. About the beginning of the year 1800 we had an uncommon hard one, owing to a sort of run on the bank: all the farmers were drawing out their money to buy flax-seed, which was expected to be the profitable crop that year. Mr. La Touche had

made a large investment in fine linen for an American house, the first he ever dealt with; but his brother-in-law, the boy Madame O'Neil shipped out, who had come to be a merchant in Baltimore, recommended it, and they were to pay ten per cent. above the ordinary price. The linen had been packed and shipped, but no money could be got for it for three months to come—that was the condition of the contract; but the house was thought safe and steady; the profits would be considerable; and Mr. La Touche was pushed by a Quaker firm in Belfast who did not know his difficulties—he never would let man know them, if it could be helped. A brother linen-merchant of the name of Clark—by-the-bye, he was a Presbyterian, and some relation to Mr. Forbes—had made him sole executor and trustee of certain house property in Armagh; all he had to leave, and a decent provision for his widow and two dumb girls. The widow, poor woman! had never been very bright; of course her husband knew that, and left the entire management of the property in La Touche's hands.

“I knew the master had scruples about it, and if the town-rates' deposit had not been used up; he would not have done it; but there was

nobody to ask him a question on the subject, nobody to know of it at all till the money came back from America, and things were made right again ; so he took a mortgage on the widow's houses to their full value, and rather above it, from a Dublin Jew of the name of Reubens. You may have heard of him, sir, for he was famous for such transactions when your firm did business in the royal city, and was known to them, if I do not mistake. Money-lenders are apt to be known to highly respectable houses. Mr. Forbes had dealt with Reubens, to my certain knowledge. I think it was through him that La Touche got acquainted with the Jew. He wasn't the worst of his kind, though he took a heavy percentage, and was hard in exacting payment. They said he had no soul to leave his gatherings to but one daughter, and there was a queer story about her. However, it has nothing to do with the one I am telling. The master knew Reubens, and took the mortgage, and we got over that push. The run on our bank slackened with the passing of the seed-time ; but as the summer drew on prices began to rise, the season was dry and warm beyond the common—old people said they never remembered such a summer—and the crops were parched up

at the roots. There was nothing like a harvest except on low-lying marshy grounds, and the flax in which our farmers put such confidence had scarcely any yield. That told on the linen trade, of course; the rapid rise in the price of materials brought down many a flourishing house in the towns of Ulster, and the dearth of 1800 set in. You'll remember it, sir, though you must have been young then. Some people said it was a judgment on Ireland for letting go her parliament. That was the year of the Union, and a great fuss there was about it in the south and west; but between the failure of the flax crop and the rise of grain, the north had matters nearer home to think of: the poor had sore want among them, business was at sixes and sevens, the best doing people in the country had to draw on their savings, and with the fall of the winter another run on the Armagh bank began.

"The American house had not paid yet; the linen had a long passage—it was nearly three months out at sea; such passages were not uncommon at the time—ships and everything else go quicker now; but when it came to hand there was a glut in the Baltimore market; the house was honourable, but it could not pay, as Mr. La Touche knew. American bills were not

thought very safe then, so he did not like to take them ; but they had promised, by high and low, to settle the whole account through their Dublin banker within the month of December.

“So much money kept out of our hands threw us back every way ; when the run began, Mr. La Touche first parted with all his plate ; he took it to Belfast himself, and sold it privately to a goldsmith he knew in High-street. Then, sir—I know it was desperation made him do it—he took a chest full belonging to Lord Lurgan, and left with him for safe keeping, and put it in pawn with a broker he could depend on. After that he borrowed from the catholic dean—good man, he lent him all he had saved up for many a year to put a painted window in the Armagh chapel after his death, and keep himself in memory among his parishioners. There was a Scotchman, too, that obliged the master—we never got over wondering at it, he was a Glasgow merchant, of the name of Macqueen, who travelled in Ulster to buy up linen for himself, and had been often enough entertained at the Bank. With these desperate expedients we got over the early part of the winter ; but the run increased as the year drew to an end and the times grew harder ; still every order was paid as it came in,

not one of the neighbours imagined that we were pressed, for the dean and the Scotchman kept the secret like true friends, and La Touche bore up at home and abroad as if nothing at all was wrong with him. He kept the worst of it even from his wife not to vex and trouble her ; poor woman she would not have made so many parties, or bought so many fine clothes if she had known how things were going ; but his hair, which had been as black as a raven at Easter, was more than half grey at Martinmas, and I know the sorest of his concerns was the mortgage on the widow's houses. Nothing else made him bring his spirit down to ask a loan of the La Touches of Dublin. They were his relations, as I have said, but had always given the Armagh Bank the cold shoulder, partly because they thought it interfered with their business in the north, and partly on account of an old quarrel which had happened between them and the master's father when he split away from the firm. However, La Touche applied to them in his extremity, and knowing they could trust him, besides wishing to keep up the credit of the family, I suppose, they consented, after a good deal of consideration and inquiry, to advance him two thousand on the security of his house and stock. I must allow

the master did not tell them the exact state of his affairs ; he kept back all about the plate, the mortgage, and the town rates. Yet La Touche was scarcely to blame for that. On the very day their inquiries began, he received a letter from the Baltimore house, stating that Burgess and Co. would pay over to him the full price of his linen, on the 21st of December.


“ ‘ Wilson,’ said he, ‘ that will take the widow’s houses and Lord Lurgan’s plate off my mind, the Dublin people’s two thousand will keep us up in spite of the run, and I will pay it off with the help of Providence and close attention to business.’ ”

“ We were in the middle of December by this time, the last of our money was gone, two or three civil farmers had been promised off, their drafts were to be paid next week, when we could get coin enough from the Dublin mint, where something had gone wrong with the dies, and the honest people believed us. The weather was terribly cold and wet ; Mr. La Touche had a severe cold, he took no care of himself, but the Missus would not hear of him going to Dublin, besides there were reasons for his staying at home. Lord Lurgan was daily expected at his seat, and the dean had fallen into what proved

his last sickness. Yet somebody must go for the money. By special agreement it was to be got in gold, as that would serve the Armagh Bank best. Raymond was his father's right-hand man, he knew the desperate position of the house, the mortgage, the borrowings, all were known to him, he was the eldest son and mainstay of the family, next to La Touche himself. Everybody knew Raymond's sense and steadiness; though but eighteen he looked a responsible man, and none would have wondered had they known the errand on which he was bound, when the master concluded on sending him to Dublin in his stead. Raymond had been there before, Burgess and Co. and the La Touches knew him, so did Mr. Forbes, his house was in Dublin then—by-the-bye, there was a whisper that the times were telling on it, but that could not have been true, for Forbes extended his business and moved to London in the next year, people said he was following the Irish parliament. I am not sure that the Palivez did not know something of Raymond too; yes, why should that surprise you? their house was in Dublin then, and had been ever since they came from Amsterdam. Well, they knew him I think—at least, all La Touche's friends did; it seemed a perfectly proper thing,

and the boy set out for Dublin, looking as handsome, high spirited, and kindly as ever I saw him. He started by the coach on Wednesday morning, and was to come back on Sunday night, for the sooner the money came the better, and Raymond promised his father he would not let the bag out of his hand or sight, from when it was locked up till it was delivered to him. He took a pair of pistols with him, and Raymond was not a bad shot.

"The Dublin mail was always well armed, and had never been stopped within the memory of man. The boy left us with every chance of safety. No letter could be expected within the time, and we waited in high hope for Sunday evening. It came: a clear starlight frosty night as one could wish to see in December. Mr. La Touche went down to the coach-office just at the hour to meet his son. The coach came into Armagh at eight precisely. I was in the office making up the fire, to have it bright and cheerful for receiving the welcome traveller and counting out the gold. The coach-office was not five minutes walk from the Bank. I heard the guard's bugle, and the roll of the wheels as it came in through the quiet night. But, oh!



I will never forget the father's face

when he rushed in and cried, 'Raymond is not there and the guard and driver know nothing about him!' It is all, in a manner, burned into my memory, like a fearful picture, not to be forgotten though put out of sight; but I can't go over it circumstantially, there is such a confusion and mixing up of troubles. I believe that from the first minute La Touche had got some kind of an impression like the terrible truth. He tried to say Raymond had been too late for the coach, and would come by the next mail; but within the same hour he took a post-chaise, bid me to break it to the Missus the best way I could, and started for Dublin with nothing but the clothes he stood in.

"I broke it to her. She stood it wonderfully at first, and said much as her husband had done about Raymond being too late and coming; but the maid told me her mistress never slept at all that night, and might be seen in all corners of the house wringing her hands and moaning like a ghost. The week passed away—the most dreadful seven days I ever knew. Mr. La Touche came back with the Sunday night's coach, looking twenty years older.

"Raymond had been at the two banks in Dublin; got the money paid down; was seen

going towards the coach-office in Castle-street with a leather bag in his hand, but there all trace of him was lost. No friend of the family had seen or heard of him ; he had not been at Forbes' or the Palivez, and from that hour to this no word or sign could ever be made out of the boy. Where he went, or what became of him, God only knows. Wherever it was, fully four thousand pounds—his father's last hope and only chance—went with him ; and if it were his own act and deed, may God forgive him ! Mr. Esthers, it is sixteen years ago, and I was but a clerk in the establishment ; yet I cannot look back on that time, and all that followed it, without feeling sick and sore.

“The first sight I got of the master when he came back, showed me that the man's spirit and heart were broken, and that he had given up his son, his money, and himself for lost. He made no concealment, no endeavour to put a fair face on anything, even to his wife and family, but sent them off to a cousin he had in the county Antrim—their parting would have moved the heart of a stone—closed his bank, told me to give up everything, and went back to Dublin to surrender and go into the Marshalsea.

“There never was such confusion and con-

sternation in any town as happened in Armagh when La Touche's bank was known to be closed. The thing was so unlikely, so unlooked for ; there were so many losers who could ill-spare it. I shall never forget the congregation of farmers and common people outside, with shieves of guinea notes in their hands, flourishing them at the windows, and threatening to pull down or burn the house if somebody did not pay them. Having no one else to fall on, the poor souls attacked me for helping the master to deceive and cheat the country. My friends wanted me to fly, and hide in Belfast ; but I stood by my own character and his, telling in public and private how we would have paid everybody, but for the loss of the money and the boy. I had not a pleasant time of it, but there was need of some voice to speak for them. Evil tongues and evil thoughts rose up against the family whose fame had stood so fair till then. There was a report—I think it began with the La Touches of Dublin, people's relations for ever, you see—that Raymond had acted according to his father's instructions, and he and the four thousand would be forthcoming when the whole business was over. I knew that to be false, and I told the hottest of the creditors so to their faces.

“ However, it was a sad and bad bankruptcy. The tradesmen’s bills, and the servants’ wages, my own salary—but I didn’t care for that—all were left unpaid. The La ‘Touches of Dublin seized on the house and stock as soon as they possibly could; the furniture and even the wearing apparel which the poor family left behind them—goodness knows they went bare enough—when sold out by auction, did not fetch a penny in the pound. Lord Lurgan threatened an indictment for the pawning of his plate; the town council talked of another for embezzlement—they meant the rates, you see; but the worst of all was the mortgage on the poor widow’s houses. Reubens, the money-lender, came down on them like a raven. I did my best for the sake of the master’s conscience, and my own knowledge of the fact, to get him to allow the widow and her dumb girls some provision. He was a horribly hard, dry old man, who had been dying of consumption from his youth, but it lasted him seventy years; there was nothing but skin and bone and love of money in the creature; but I got Dargan the attorney to write to him about a flaw we thought was in the mortgage, and, thank God, the poor family did get a trifle—just enough to keep them in a poor cottage

with their own spinning. There is only one of the daughters living now, and Miss Livey has taken her. Oh! but she—Miss Livey I mean—was the wild woman when it all came to her knowledge. Sometimes her temper and sometimes her grief got the better of her senses. They tell me she has never been the same since. Her belief was what I could never think true, it was so unlike the boy, that Raymond had gone off with the money to spend it in America or France. From that opinion nothing could move her; though no advertisement, no search, no offer of rewards, could ever bring forth the least intelligence of him being seen on board a ship or anywhere after he passed down Castle-street. She stood to it that he had bribed ship captains, and disguised himself, and for his sake she took a hatred to all boys.

“Little Lucien—the child was not seven then—had to be kept out of her sight, in a manner; and when his uncle O’Neil offered to take and bring him up to his business, by way of providing for one of the children, she packed him off with Denis Dulan’s wife, whom her husband had sent for to Baltimore saying, if he followed his brother’s example it should not be in Ireland. The poor Missus had always been under her

fingers, and the only dispute they ever had was about the lost boy. His poor mother would not hear it said that her Raymond had run away with his father's money. She cried over the shame and sorrow night and day, and would mind nothing else, till one night early in the New Year she roused the house, and nearly the whole neighbourhood, though it was the open country, with screams that she had seen Raymond in her room, and that he told her he had been murdered and buried in an old house in Dublin. The nurse, who had gone with them from Armagh, and all the old women about, believed that Mrs. La Touche had seen something; but the poor lady's brain was just giving up. From that hour she never spoke a sensible word, raving continually about her son, the old house, and the man that murdered him, and how he should be brought to justice. She lived in that way for seven years; being otherwise quiet and easily managed. It was a dreary house they had, in the midst of a farm which the master had bought for his cousin when he was well off, and the boy could not get married without it. The cousin had no family, and his wife was dead; but his housekeeper couldn't agree with Miss Livey. I don't know what she didn't say

of the woman : nothing tames woman's tongue, Mr. Esthers; so he gave the La Touches part of his house for old time's sake, and walled up the door between him and them. Miss Livey made the girls spin, and managed carefully what the cousin allowed them off the farm ; but they would have been poor enough if it had not been for a friend that sent them money every quarter ; first less, and then more, till it came to a decent little income. The man who told me heard it from Miss Livey herself. They are getting that money yet, and neither she nor one of the family ever could make out from whence it came. Of all the charity and kindness poor La Touche had done in his day, of all the neighbours he had helped and the strangers he had entertained, there was not one to show the slightest remembrance in the midst of his ruin and disgrace, but a man who had very little right, and that was my present employer, Mr. Forbes. He had known the master only in the way of business, and that for a short time ; yet, from the first day of their misfortunes, he was never done sending the family presents of goods and money, and, Mr. Esthers, he is sending them still, though I nor nobody ever heard him mention Raymond's business if he could help it ; but he

is a sober, serious man, very particular about his words, and it is hard to think of what anyone should say on that matter. One thing Mr. La Touche told me when I saw him last, that Forbes had solemnly asserted to him his belief in Raymond's innocence, bad as the case looked.

" 'And Wilson,' said my master, when going over the circumstance—' I couldn't see his face, for it was twilight and he sat in the corner, but judging from his voice, Forbes could not have been more moved if the boy had been his son instead of mine — Wilson, I have the same belief, God be praised for it, my Raymond did not do all that has been done of his own will and wickedness, and Providence will make his innocence clear when I am dead and gone.'

" My poor master spoke thus to me when he lay sick in the Marshalsea. I think his sickness was just heart-break, though the doctors called it decline. At any rate he got out of the troubles of his bankruptcy and the danger of the indictments, for before the law had gone through half its course he died, in his poor prison room, and in a most Christian manner, leaving his blessing to his family—it was all he had to leave them—and visited and looked after in all his wants and wishes by Mr. Forbes. It was a thing I never

knew till the Dublin undertaker, who has now set himself up in Holborn, told me that Forbes paid the whole expense of his funeral—and such a handsome one never went out of the Marshalsea. Miss Livey says that the money he sent helped to bury the girls too as became their family. Poor things! they dropped off one after another as they grew up in that out-of-the-world farmhouse: it stands on the Antrim coast, two miles from the Giant's Causeway. They say their mother never missed them, nor her husband either; but she went at last herself, and died saying she was going to get justice for Raymond."

"It is a strange story," said his companion, as the elder man came to a pause—"a very strange story. You say the Palivezi were in Dublin at the time?"

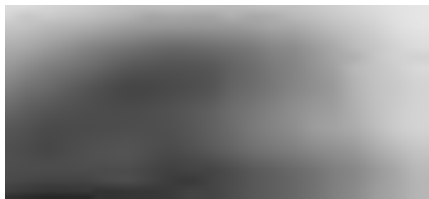
"The Palivezi?—is that how one should call them?—I never could make out the proper way of Greek names—yes; they were in Dublin, but they had nothing to do with the business."

"Of course not; madame's father was alive then, but getting old—superannuated, in a manner—and she was taking the direction of affairs."

In what a slow, summing-up fashion that metallic voice spoke.

“Yes; but they could give no intelligence of Raymond—in fact, had not seen him at all; I heard it from her own mouth, having to wait on madame to beg her influence with the Jew Reubens. How grand and handsome she looked. They tell me she looks the very same yet. And how handsomely she acted by us! The Jew stood in fear of her, I understand—from some cause of money, no doubt—and her word went as far as the attorney’s letter. Dear me, it is one o’clock, and I promised to be with my sister in Hammersmith at half-past,” and the grey-haired man rose.

“I’ll walk part of the way with you,” said his junior. “Waiter, our bill;” and after settling their account at the coffee-house, the two walked out—and I sat there alone, pondering on that sad story of misery and sin. I had need to ponder, as the sequel will prove.



CHAPTER III.

MORTON'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

I sat as I had done for an hour and more, silent and motionless, with the unread paper in my hand. The men who had talked within a few feet of me had not been aware of my presence; the box I occupied was somewhat out of sight in a corner of that old coffee-house. Had they seen they would not have recognised me, and under other circumstances I should not have known them; but the story to which I listened was that of my own luckless family; the narrator was my father's old and faithful clerk, Wat Wilson, and I was the little Lucien La Touche, who had been sent so early to his uncle in America. Every particular related had place in my memory, stamped there with a force and vividness no after event could overlay, for they stood among life's first impressions. Our pleasant old house in

Armagh, with its homely business and frequent merrymakings. The faces of my father and mother—the one so manly, the other so beautiful. My young sisters and our plays in house and garden; my granddam, too, with her kindness and her tempers; and, above all, our clever, handsome, elder brother, Raymond, of whom we were so proud and fond. Then there was the Sunday night, when he did not come back, and we lost him for ever; my father's return from that vain, heartbreaking search; our sudden poverty in the lonely farm-house, and the night of nameless terror, when my mother's reason gave way. All stood out with terrible distinctness from the misty back-ground of my earliest recollections. The connecting chain of causes and circumstances, not to be apprehended by the child's mind, had been partly learned and partly guessed at in after years. The honest clerk's narrative made them still clearer, and also showed me the extent of my family's obligations to the Scotch banker, whom I yet knew only by name. From the depths of my soul I blessed the generous man whose sympathy had helped my father through his last desolate days, and given him the handsomest funeral that ever went out of the Marshalsea. Might the blessing of those who

visited the sick and in prison come upon him ! If fortune ever permitted me I would acknowledge the deep debt to him and his.

. In the meantime I had returned from America—a stranger to all that ever knew me—a man of twenty-three, strongly resembling my father in person even as my childhood promised, with his strength of bone and muscle, his ruddy brown complexion, rounded face, and dark curling hair ; ay—and in spite of those gloomy shadows cast on the morning sky of my life—with his cheerful temperament and brave will to work my way and get my share of the world's good things, if it were possible. Excepting that voyage in the charge of Denis Dulan's wife, and that I had been sixteen years with my uncle, the merchant in Baltimore, my existence had no history known to friends or kindred on this side of the Atlantic. It had a story, nevertheless, which must be told, however briefly, for the better understanding of that which was to come.

Mrs. Dulan delivered me safely towards the end of my seventh year into the guardian hands of Gerald O'Neil, then one of the wealthiest merchants in the capital of Maryland, and my maternal uncle.

The first glance I got of him brought Madame

O'Neil, my grandmother, with all the awe she used to inspire, back on my childish mind. He had the same tall, upright figure, and stern, handsome face; a prince among merchants, rather by his manners than his means—trading in a noble, lordly fashion, with high honour in his own transactions, and rigid exaction of his rights from others; he was half-feared, wholly trusted, and held in more than common repute among the ready and rising men of that new world.

With the destiny that compelled him to trade, my uncle had determined to be even, by founding a house of merchant-princes. With that purpose he had toiled and reckoned ever since the old madame shipped him off; and he got into the counting-house of an old family follower, who had emigrated before the last turret of Finmore Castle fell, and grown rich in America.

My uncle had been lucky there too: rose to be a partner in the concern, bought out the old follower's interest, reigned in his stead, and largely increased the business and importance of the house. Nobody called him a screw or a skinflint, but everybody knew he could get money and take care of it. To build a mercantile firm of the first magnitude was the object which he

did not avow in so many words—my uncle was too proud for such opening of his mind—but he never concealed it.

His home was an American boarding-house ; his establishment was one black servant. He gave no entertainments ; he took no holidays ; he went to few places of amusement ; he made no intimate friends, and though always courteous—as became a descendant of Tyrone—he paid no particular attention to the ladies.

Baltimore contests the prize of beauty with all America, as Limerick does with my native Ireland, but my uncle had kept clear of its snares. No match sufficiently advantageous to help in the building of his great pyramid had been presented to his view, and he was too bent on the business to regard any other attraction. If there had ever been a soft part in the man's nature, it was trodden out in the working, reckoning routine of his life.

There was nothing when I knew him but worldly prudence, energy, and pride. He would found the great mercantile house of O'Neil, since no better could be done ; and not choosing to marry himself, for the reasons specified, he would bring up the son of his only sister, on whom such heavy misfortunes had fallen, to be his heir and

successor in the grand design, and take his name and arms if found worthy of them.

Such, I believe, were the old gentleman's intentions when he received me with haughty kindness from the hands of Mrs. Dulan ; honest woman, she could not have had more care or concern about her own child, rewarded her fidelity with a five-dollar note, exclusive of all costs, and gave orders for my ntertainment in the boarding-house till he could find a school for me. A school was found within the same week in an airy suburb of the town. My uncle gave precise directions what I was to be taught. His curriculum included all the branches of a sound English education, supplemented by French and Latin ; and the headmaster was specially requested to let him know if I had any particular talent. I believed the excellent man at first discovered one for poetry and the belles letters ; but finding that such abilities were not likely to find appreciation with my uncle, he settled down on arithmetic and general application. It is to be hoped this last discovery was genuine ; if not an apt, I was a willing scholar. My uncle had not told me so—he was not in the habit of telling—but, with seven-year-old penetration, I found out that the acquisition and retention of his good graces depended on my getting

on at school ; and the neccessity of pleasing him got so impressed on my mind at the beginning of our acquaintance, that it was not fairly worn out at its end. There was nobody else for me to please or look to. Father, mother, Aunt Livey, and sisters—all had been left far off beyond the sea, and I was alone, under the absolute government of that stern, busy, unfathomable man, as he seemed to my childhood, and somewhat also to my later years. My uncle was not harsh or even unkind to me. He brought me up, he paid for my schooling, and would have provided for me handsomely, but I could never feel at home with him, nor he with me, even when increasing years brought us nearer each other's status in the rational world. Our natures were contrary, and could not come together.

Morton's grammar school, the seminary at which he placed me, was one of the best and oldest institutions of its kind in Baltimore. It had been established by a Scotch family, for the education of Protestant youth, when Maryland was a Roman Catholic colony under the Calverts, and had flourished ever since, descending from father to son like a patrimony, the ranks of its inferior teachers being always recruited from Scotland and the Morton clan. They were three

in number, besides the head-master, owner and governor of the establishment, a man above seventy, who held at once the reins and the ferrule for more than forty years, he was by pre-eminence, Mr. Morton. Then three was his nephew, assistant and successor, known to us by the style and title of Mr. Andrew Morton; he superintended the second form. Next came Mr. Alexander Morton; I think he was a third cousin some years younger and very lean; he managed the third and fourth; and last of all there was Master Melrose Morton a very young man, almost a boy indeed, for he was but ten years older than myself, and had the direction of the fifth and sixth forms, being quite a new hand, and not two months imported when I took my seat at the lowest end of the latter.

I was then the youngest boy in the school, and the last that could be received. There was a rule in the establishment, laid down by its first founder, and not to be broken under high and mysterious penalties, that no more than forty scholars should be taken under any inducement. The boys were uncertain whether that limit had been fixed in commemoration of Moses' forty days' fast, or of Ali Baba's forty thieves; but they all agreed in a tradition of the grammar school having been burnt to the ground, and the

greater part of Baltimore with it, nearly a hundred years before, when the reigning Morton was induced to break that mystic rule in favour of the Governor's son. However that might be, no more than forty would the grammar school or its master receive; and I think his active old dame, Mrs. Morton (by-the-bye, she spoke broad Scotch, and always wore a checked apron) found it quite enough to provide for in bed and board—for they kept no day scholars—with the help of her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Andrew, three maids, and one man, who were all growing old in the service, and believed to be Mortons. Contrary to the use and wont of Baltimore, no negroes were employed on the premises. The burning of the school was said to have been effected by one new brought from Guinea in that slave-trading time. It was not the only particular in which the Mortons pleased to differ from current custom; they were Presbyterians, and we were marched to the meeting-house twice every Sunday, rank and file, with the teachers at the head of their respective divisions, and ranged in three high narrow pews appointed for our accommodation in that low-pitched cheerless edifice, which had been built about the time of the Salem witch burning, when the first Scotch congrega-

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tion set up their camp in Maryland, and expected to bring not only the colony, but the Indian tribe, who then filled all the forests west of Chesapeake Bay, over to the Westminster Confession. I don't know what the old madame would have said about my sitting there for good seven hours every Sunday, but it did not trouble my uncle. In the hot pursuit of wealth and mercantile pre-eminence, he had got free of priestly trammels, if they ever hung much about him. On the subject of religion, I nor nobody else ever heard him speak. He was seen, but not very frequently, in all the churches, Protestant and Catholic, which the city then contained. The grammar school was a good one, and he sent me to the Mortons without making difficulties about the meeting-house. I learned to stand up at the extemporary prayers of the old Scotch minister—his name was Renwick, and he was said to be of the family of the last Cameronian preacher who suffered for the Covenant—to sit at the psalm singing, given out line by line, and guiltless of organ or pitch-pipe ; to take rank at the foot of my class before the pulpit, and repeat my share of the Assembly's Catechism, ay, and to play pins with prudence and circumspection, while the long prayer was going forward, and

thanks to the high woodwork in front, nobody could possibly guess what I and my playfellows were about but Master Melrose.

We all knew him to be no strict disciplinarian. Promising never to do the like again, was generally sufficient to get pardon, or at least, silence, for the most heinous of our grammar-school offences. Whatever could be supposed unseen, Master Melrose did not see—that is to say, did not report it—which would have brought us into trouble, for all the rest of the Mortons were rigidly conscientious teachers. Melrose was conscientious, too, but he was kindly with it; no offender escaped without a rebuke from him in private, no lesson could be left unlearned somehow.

He had a troop of little boys to govern, and got his share of vexation and trouble in that thankless office; the larger boys found out that his salary was not large, and his relationship to the head-master very distant, on which account they were inclined to make small of him.

I don't know whether he found me easiest managed, or whether he took kindly to me from hearing I was a stranger and an orphan, but kindly he did take; and before I was a week at the grammar school, my trust and confidence

were placed in the patronage and protection of Master Melrose.

He stood by me, not overtly. Melrose had come from Scotland, and was sub to three, besides the old and young Mrs. Morton, who supervised him considerably; but in a private, unnoticeable manner, he maintained my cause and supported my spirits through hard lessons, broken rules, and attempts at fagging by the young tyrants of the grammar school.

The third usher took me by the hand, and I clung to him, having no other friend. Boy or man could not have had a better one, though no two were ever more unlike than we.

Melrose was serious and thoughtful beyond his years, beyond most people of any age. The boys had a notion that he must have seen a ghost, or met something extraordinary in Scotland to make him so sober.

Sober, Melrose was in look and manner, but by no means sour or slow, as sober people are apt to be. Every soul about the grammar school knew him to be thoroughly good-natured; he was the resource of everyone in a scrape or a pickle, as my lost brother Raymond had been far away in Armagh. He was active in person, quick in learning, and keen in observation, particularly of

character. A more honestly or sensibly conscientious soul I never knew.

Young as he was, his moral principles were as high and as clear as those of a Christian philosopher. He was deeply and devoutly religious, but after undemonstrative Presbyterian fashion ; a studious lover of learning for its own sake ; not endowed with any particular gift or talent, except that rare one, the power of reasoning well ; and troubled with no particular weakness, except a considerable amount of honest Scottish pride, which made him careful of what people might think or say.

In face, Melrose was neither plain nor handsome ; he had the high cheekbones and deep-set eyes of the north, a tolerably fair complexion, dark brown hair, a little wavy and in fair quantity. His figure was tall, rawboned, and angular ; but there was a general appearance of strength and firmness about him, which I think were the distinguishing attributes of his character, too. A silent, steady youth, wise in his words, upright in his ways, making no acquaintances, because he felt the want of none, minding his daily duties in the grammar school, and going home to his mother every night, where she lived in a decent little house on the outskirts of Baltimore. Such

was Melrose Morton when I knew him first, and such he continued to be through all the years of our friendship.

It thickened every day. I had need of friends then, and Melrose stepped into the place left vacant in my early world.

By degrees I got intimate enough to be taken home with him to see his mother, a kindly grey-haired old lady. Small their house was, and their income must have been. I am not sure that they had much more than the third usher's earnings, yet nobody could call Mrs. Morton and her son anything but lady and gentleman, they had such a look of ancient good-breeding.

I noticed, too, that Mrs. Morton did not speak broad Scotch like the mistress of the grammar school; and in one of my visits I heard her speak accidentally, and not meant for my hearing, of the time they lived in Dublin.

Solitary meditations on that subject brought me to tell Melrose, in one of our quiet walks—he used to take me with him up Jones's Falls, and over the hills, when the school hours were done Saturday afternoons—the sad, strange, family secret which I had been warned to keep: it is the only rule of conduct my uncle ever gave, and the only mention of it I ever heard him make.

Well, I took the opportunity to tell Melrose all I knew about my brother Raymond, and how he had been lost, with a vague, childish hope that, as he had enlightened me on so many matters, he might be able to clear up that mystery too, and a certain trust that he would not betray my confidence.

We were in a narrow place beside the Falls, far out of sight or hearing of anybody; the mossy grass was slippery, for it was autumn time. I remember the dark red flush of the American trees. Melrose was in advance, holding me fast by the hand. I felt his fingers twitch and tremble as if they had been struck by sudden palsy; and when I looked up into his face, the expression of fearful memory that was in it made me stop short and say in my simplicity, "Did you see him? did he tell you why he went away?"

Melrose stood still for a minute or more, as if considering what he should say, and then answered, "No, Lucien; how should I see him here in Baltimore?"

"But you were in Dublin; Mrs. Morton said so last Saturday; maybe it was long ago?" said I.

"Yes, Lucien, it was very long ago. If I

could tell you anything about your brother, I would do it"—how hardly the words seemed to come!—"but I cannot; and your uncle was right in bidding you never speak of him. Take his bidding like a good boy; if you don't, it will bring great evil to yourself and your family; and when you grow up you will know the reason why."

Melrose said a good deal more in the same strain, as grown people are apt to talk to children. I promised never to speak of Raymond more, and I never ventured to break that promise; but in spite of his declaration that he could tell me nothing, in spite of my trust in the truth of all his sayings, I had a secret conviction at the time that he knew more than he pleased to tell. It puzzled me—it was a trouble to think of; it lay in my mind year after year, like a lost key at the bottom of a deep well, not to be got to the lock it could open, and forming the dim, mysterious limit of our friendship.

In all my after visits to his mother I never heard her mention Dublin again, and the only fragment of his family history Melrose ever revealed to me was, that he had been an only son, and named in honour of a little town in the

south of Scotland, where his father had lived and died a parish schoolmaster.

I cannot tell how or why, but it became clear to my childish understanding that Melrose did not like to hear me speak of my old home in Armagh, which I was much inclined to do in the early stage of our acquaintance. I had a great zeal to please the third usher, for he pleased me, so the unwelcome subject was dropped between us. There was nobody else to whom I could talk of it; the boys of the grammar school would take no interest in it, and I had been warned not to tell them of my brother Raymond, which was the only wonder. My uncle never conversed with me at all; indeed, he never saw me but for two hours on the first Monday of every quarter, when I was sent for to his boarding-house, strictly examined in his private room on all the branches of my education, commanded to apply myself steadily to every one of them, presented with two dollars for pocket-money, and dismissed with a sealed note in my hand to the head-master.

The waiting in the parlour for that to be written was an awful process to me. It must have contained my uncle's verdict on my progress, and was probably something like 'not

guilty;' for, though old Mr. Morton always looked grave and grand when he read it, I don't remember to have met with any bad consequences. There were no vacations at that school but Thanksgiving Week and the anniversary of American Independence. The boys scattered off then, but as I was not wanted home to the boarding-house, most of my holiday time was spent with Melrose and his mother.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ADVENTURE IN BALTIMORE.

So here time wore on. I rose from one form to another; I took some prizes, I got into some scrapes; I grew up to boyhood with all its attendant mischief and troublesomeness. I learned to call myself a Marylander, and come out powerfully with squibs and crackers on the 4th of July. Things not talked of melt rapidly away from the memory of the young. My old Irish home grew strange and dim in my recollection; so did the household faces. I heard of the deaths of my sisters and my mother as the successive announcements reached my uncle. He gave the intelligence in due form, as if it had been a piece of sombre news, and I heard it with almost as little feeling. The first death, indeed, was a blow; it happened only two years after I came; but for the rest, they had all

grown dead and dream-like to me, in that long and early absence. I am not sure that I did not come to be ashamed of the family. Time had made me sensible of the ruin and disgrace that fell on them through my brother's disappearance. I had outlived the sorrow, but not the terrible memories, the marvel and mystery of that inexplicable loss. I knew now why it should not be mentioned to strangers—how damaging it would be to my future position and prospects, as my uncle's mercantile assistant and probable heir. The old merchant himself, with all the blood and honour of the O'Neils to help him, could not have guarded the secret with more anxious care than I did. Nobody about me knew or dreamt of it. The emigrants who had come from our part of Ulster were poor Irish, and did not come in contact with such young American citizens as were taught and boarded in the large brick house, and played in the wide meadow-like green beside the river, which constituted the grounds and premises of Morton's Grammar School. Melrose had forgotten that I ever told him, that was clear to me, though his look at the time was queer to remember, and always recurred in my bad dreams, which were sure to go back

to that Sunday night and my father's home coming. Well, the family secret was dead and buried in that far-off country, with new associations, and a world opening before me; but these graves of the past never keep their trust well. The shadows that could come out of that silent background told on my outward life; it had something to keep from its public, something to be cautious and reserved about. That consciousness made me careful of my own goings in the slippery paths of youth. There were pitfalls on every side, into some of which my brother must have slipped, and dragged his family down to ruin. I was bound to take care of my steps, and whether this conviction or my form of character kept me out of harm's way, I know not, but I grew up a well-conducted and solitary youth. At sixteen my education was pronounced finished. My uncle sent for me to his private room, put me through a final examination, declared himself satisfied with my progress, appointing me to a desk in his own counting-house, with board and a small salary, and gave me a distant intimation that in process of time, and on proper behaviour, I might be elevated to the post of junior partner.

Of course, I made suitable acknowledgments,

and set myself to getting qualified for the promotion. Hadn't the grammar school boys felicitated me on the prospect of stepping into old O'Neil's shoes? Had not my uncle made me sensible of the great house he was to found for somebody to be the head of in his absence—(that was the old gentleman's mode of hinting at his mortality)—and should I not get over all the accountable blots on my family escutcheon with the name and arms of O'Neil, backed by an unshaken credit and an extensive capital? My own honour and profit were not the utmost limits of those early calculations. The sister whom death had spared was also the one of our household to whom my memory clung. The rest were too much my seniors, and in their own sorrows and sickness, poor girls, seemed to have forgotten the absent child. The cloud that darkened my mother's mind made her place dim in my recollection, too. But Rhoda was only one year older than myself—my first play-fellow, the hardest to part from, the longest missed, and the most mindful of me. She had sent bookmarks, messages, and latterly letters in large copy hand, not very well spelt, and manifestly written to the dictation of Miss Livey. Under it she must have grown a young


woman by this time, in the end of the solitary farm-house where I left her ; but it was still the face of a fair child, with large blue eyes and light brown curls, that rose to my remembrance. Never mind the ill-spelt letters ; Rhoda should have teachers and station when I became a merchant ; we would live all our days together, pension off Miss Livey, and do wonders for Melrose Morton.

Such were the hopes that cheered me through the long day's work at the desk and the evening life in the boarding-house. It was a retired and select one, situated at the end of West-street, and kept by an old Quaker lady, who took in only single men of approved steadiness, and none of them under fifty, except myself, whom she admitted into her mansion, as I was given to understand, solely on account of my uncle, because he had been with her twenty-six years, and wished to have me in a safe house, otherwise under his eye. The single men were all merchants, like himself, devoted heart and soul to their warehouses and to nothing else, though some of them did go to church on Sundays. They all remembered the War of Independence, and believed a republic was the thing for trade. They all had their evening papers,

their glasses of hot rum and water, a game of backgammon, and rubber of whist ; and I never heard them talking of anything but business and the money market.

With that lively society at home, my daily work with ledgers and accounts, my immoveable uncle, and no friend but Melrose, I grew from youth to manhood as lonely as I had been at the grammar school, and for the same reasons. I did not take to gaiety or worse ; my uncle considered company unfit for a man of business, and did not approve of frequenting theatres. I had inherited, with my father's likeness, his honestly social and domestic character ; it made me feel the want of home ties and affections, but it kept me out of dissipation such as a young and limited clerk might fall into in a growing commercial town.

Still I was always solitary, and often weary of my position, even of my prospects. Rhoda's letters became less comfort, as I grew older and wiser to observe my sister's want of genteel education and breeding ; besides, they generally contained a good deal of my grand-aunt's expectations of what I ought to do for the family, with sidelong warnings against my elder brother's sin. In this state of unsatisfactory proba-



tion I passed nearly four years, and obtained some amount of the promised promotion. My uncle, to use his own words, found me capable of business, and elevated me step by step to the post of his chief clerk.

He did not employ many hands, considering the extent of his transactions, which, I have forgotten to mention, were principally with Levantine merchants. He exported tobacco to them, and imported their goods in return; it was a profitable line of business, and my uncle did the largest of it in Baltimore. Yet there were only three in the counting-house besides myself, and one of them about this time—by-the-bye, he was the sub of all—got dismissed for coming too late three times in one week, and was superseded by a young man recently arrived in America, but boasting some experience in our department in trade. “He has been nearly five years with the Palivez, and ought to know something about Levantine business. I understand his father was in the bank before him, but he is dead, and the young man has got two sisters to support, probably that made him think of emigration; when the bank was removed to London, perhaps they did not want Joyce, that is the young man’s name,” said my uncle; “I


hear their business is getting quite private and aristocratic under the management of old Palivez's daughter; she is a wonderful woman, that."

My uncle was beginning to take me into confidence, my talk and conversation at the boarding-house having given him an opinion of my discretion. We had dry chats occasionally about the ledgers, the clerks, and the warehousemen, about the mercantile connexions of the firm, and often about the said Palivez, or Palivezi, as in Greek fashion they should have been called, for they were of the old Hellenic stock, and said to be descended from Grecian princes, who held sway on the northern shores of the Euxine sea, before Tartar or Muscovite had dominion there; but we knew them only as a banking-house which had done business first in Novgorod, then in Amsterdam, next in Dublin, and, at the time of my story, was finally established in Old Broad-street, London. The bank had been cashing bills and receiving letters of credit from Venice, before Constantinople became a Turkish city. Ever since, in spite of so many removals, its credit had been growing and its operations extending under successive Palivez, who governed it from father to son, like a

line of monarchs, till the year 1801, when its wealth and responsibility at once devolved upon a daughter, the last of her family, and generally acknowledged to be equal to the best of them in business abilities, for she had virtually managed the concern in the last years of her father's life—people said the man was not incapacitated, but chose to half retire, either for the purpose of giving his daughter time to practise, or to betake himself strongly to the devotions and austerities of the Greek church. At all events, he died in 1801, and the heiress signalized her accession by removing the establishment to Old Broadstreet, and, as my uncle had remarked, narrowing its operations to large and very safe transactions with the Levant and Mediterranean towns.

Our firm had done business with the house for many a year. My uncle had a high report of its honour and liberality—no other was ever given of the Palivez in my hearing ; unlike most Greek houses, they had earned and maintained a mercantile character of the first order, and their princely descent had not been shamed by the long line of bankers. The family had always been regarded as a kind of nobility, even in Dublin. They lived privately, but in considerable state, employed nobody but Greeks in their

household service ; Jews or Russians formed the staple of their retainers in the bank, but they had always kept a native clerk or two in the city, where they sojourned, and our new sub, Jeremy Joyce, had been the last of their Irish employés. He was a small, harmless, subdued creature, remarkably unlike an Irishman, with light yellow hair, and a pale face, which would have been boyishly handsome but for a pinched, sickly, weak-minded expression which never left it under any circumstances. On the whole, there was something melancholy about Joyce, as if life had not gone well with him ; a look of being cowed and kept down beyond his merits, and knowing there was no use in trying to better himself. The clerks thought him a sort of acquisition, because it was supposed he could tell them the peculiarities of the Greek house, regarding which two singular traditions had floated out as far as the United States—indeed, they were known wherever the Palivez did business—one was to the effect that none of the family ever survived beyond middle life ; fifty was said to be the utmost limit any of them had reached ; and the other set forth that all their wives were brought from, and all their daughters sent back to, the ancient seats of the race in Eastern



Russia. A man who had been in their bank for five years, and his father before him, might be supposed to have got some genuine information on those curious subjects; the probability gave me, and even my uncle, an interest in Joyce, but, to our general disappointment, the little man, though otherwise obliging and communicative, could not be got to speak of the Palivez' except in monosyllables. "Yes, sir," "no, sir," and "I am sure I don't know," were the utmost that the best aimed question could extract. It was not simplicity, though quiet and submissive to an extraordinary degree for a native of his country; Joyce was keen to observe, shrewd to remark, and very dextrous to discover. The clerks agreed he had reasons for keeping a close mouth. My uncle said those Eastern houses accustomed their servants to discretion, and Joyce went on like the rest of the counting-house.

Some two months after his settlement, I was taking a stroll through that oldest part of Baltimore which lies along the harbour, in the cool of the summer evening, when in a narrow thoroughfare, called Wharf-street, and leading to the water's edge, I saw two women walking quickly before me. The one was tall and the

other little, the former was talking in a high-pitched voice, and words that sounded like scolding, and as I passed them close to get a better view, I discovered that the little one was very pretty, but manifestly under rebuke; while the tall woman, besides being remarkably thin and bony, had her whole countenance brought to that peculiar sharpness of edge popularly known as hatchet-face, a pair of intensely black eyes, with that indescribable look of wildness in them always indicative of the unsound or unsafe mind, and a quantity of coarse ill-kept hair of the same intense blackness, but getting sprinkled with grey, completed her most singular and not prepossessing appearance. Moreover, she had on an old dingy gown with a couple of rents in it, a cloak that had once been red, but was now extremely rusty, a battered beaver hat, with a broken feather in it; yet it was my belief that any connoisseur of female attire would have known that her habiliments had once been fine and fashionable. Never did I see such a contrast to the girl who walked by her side; she did not look more than sixteen, her small but beautifully rounded figure was shown to advantage by the nankeen pelisse; a young face, fair and soft as the finest waxwork, with the living

rose bloom on her cheek and lip, her large blue eyes cast down, and shaded by a flow of curls that looked really golden under a pretty silk hat and blue ribbons, spoke to my mind as such letters of recommendation do to most men, particularly in their twenty-first year.

CHAPTER V.

SOMEBODY'S SISTER.

I COULD not help slackening my pace to look at the young lady I passed, thinking Rhoda must be something like that girl, and wondering how she got into such company. The tall woman had proceeded with her oration—it was of reproof—and the pretty girl seemed to quail under it ; but she also observed me. I saw her give me a sly glance—it was half curiosity, half encouragement. At the same moment her companion's attention was suddenly drawn to me. She stopped abruptly, turned her fierce black eyes upon me, and unwilling to provoke her animadversions, though there was nobody else in the street to hear them I hurried on. It was not a minute more before I heard the steps of the two women still behind me, and as we were passing a tavern of the lower order, out rushed a band of Danish sailors from

St. Thomas's, all drunk and in a grand quarrel. Any sober man would have been glad to get out of their way, and the women seemed frightened out of their senses. The elder uttered a loud, sharp scream, and fled down the street before them; the younger attempted to follow, but the drunken Danes striking and shouting at each other like so many demons, were upon her; and in the girl's terror—I believe it was nothing else—she ran to my side and clung to my arm. Ready, and perhaps glad of the chance of playing the knight-errant to so fair a damsel, I drew her into the nearest doorway, placed myself between her and the fighting sailors, and bid her not to be afraid.

The Danes were gone in an instant, but the poor girl seemed almost fainting. I was turning to the tavern to get a glass of wine for her, when she clung to me once more with—"Oh! sir, don't leave me. What has become of my sister?"

"Your sister?" said I, fairly taken by surprise. Did she mean that terrible woman? But here the sharp loud scream came up the street.

"Oh! she is in a fit—she is killed," cried the poor little girl, still holding fast. I ran with her to the spot from whence the scream pro-

ceeded, and there, half sitting, half lying on a door-step with a crowd rapidly gathering round from the neighbouring houses and lanes, and evidently in a convulsive fit, we found the elder woman. The Danes had rushed by her without molesting her. "But Sally always takes such fits when she is frightened. Oh! how will we get home—what shall I do?" and the young girl began to ring her hands and cry, while she still clung to my side.

"Don't be afraid," said I, drawing the small rounded arm close into mine. What man would not have done so in like circumstances?

With the help of some of the gathering crowd I got the woman lifted from the door-step, called a coach, had her placed in it, handed in the pretty girl, who begged me not to leave them, and said their lodgings were in Charles-street—second floor. Of course I did not leave two women in such distress, but went home with them to Charles-street, helped to get the elder sister upstairs and laid on her bed. The convulsions had ceased by this time, and she lay without motion or consciousness; but when I offered to run for a doctor, the younger sister, who recovered her composure wonderfully, now that they were safe at home, assured me there was no call for one. Sally

always took such fits when she was frightened or surprised, but she would soon come round. The best thing was to let her lie still; doctors did her no good. They had tried a score of the greatest men in Dublin. "But, oh, sir, we will never forget your kindness—never, never," and she wiped her large blue eyes and looked me in the face.

"I did nothing but what any man ought to have done, and been happy to do," said I. "But shouldn't you have a nurse or a doctor? Have you any friends whom I could send to you?"

"No, sir, we are strangers here; but my brother Jeremy will soon be in, and there is no use in getting doctors for Sally."

"Your brother Jeremy!" said I, "is your name Joyce?" Notwithstanding the pretty face and the fashionable pelisse, there was that in the girl's manner which made me free and easy as with one's inferior. Her speech was not that of a gentlewoman, neither was her air; and, independent of the elder sister's peculiarities, the rooms to which I accompanied them, though well enough furnished for a second-floor, seemed in a chronic state of dust and disorder. Besides she had a kind of resemblance to my uncle's new clerk; and when she said with a smile and a

blush—"Yes, sir, that is our name, and I think I know your's—are you not Mr. O'Neil, the great merchant's nephew?"

I responded—"I am, Miss Joyce." We were growing very familiar; but the girl had looked at me so archly, I pulled forward one of the dusty chairs, and sat down almost by her side.

"Oh! I thought so," she said, half hiding behind the window curtain; "Jeremy told us so much about you. Was it not wonderful we should meet and be frightened by those sailors? I hope Sally will soon wake up. It is dreadful to sit here alone; but I have to sit so many an evening."

"Shall I tell the landlady to come up?" There was something that inwardly warned me to say so at that moment, and get home as soon as I could.

"Oh! no," said Miss Joyce, "not for the world. She is so old and cross."

I couldn't go just then, and I shook the warning off my mind. It was no harm to sit with a pretty girl in such trying circumstances, so we sat and talked. She told me about her brother Jeremy, what a dear good brother he was, and their only support; how they had lived in Dublin, and been very happy while father and he

were in Palivez' bank ; but they did not save much ; only just a little fortune for her. Jeremy had put it away in some American bank till she was married ; and she did not know when that would happen—perhaps never. She didn't see anybody she liked yet. There was a captain who paid her attentions in Dublin, but they had to go away when the bank was removed ; and Sally and Jeremy would go to America, because Madame advised them. She didn't like that Madame Palivez. No doubt I did my part in the conversation, and took the opportunity to say some acceptable things as to the certainty of her getting married, the captain showing his good taste, and my own satisfaction with Sally and Jeremy for bringing her to Baltimore. But just as I was repeating that statement for the third time, and she declaring that men did nothing but fib and flatter, there came a shrill shout from the adjoining room of "Who are you giggling with there Rosanna?"

The elder sister had evidently woke up. Rosanna flew in, and shut the door so tightly that I could hear nothing but a querulous whisper ; but in a minute or two she came out looking very red, and saying, "Sally sent her compliments ; she would never forget my uncommon kindness.

If Jeremy was at home he would thank me too ; she didn't know what kept him, but it was growing very late."

I took the hint to take my departure, with many assurances that I had done nothing, and a kind shake hands with Rosanna. How soft and fair her hand was, and how it seemed to rest in mine ! With a second leave-taking at the top of the stairs, and a declaration that Sally would be very glad to see me when she was well enough and could sit by, I went home to my uncle's boarding-house.

How dull and frowsy the evening papers, the glasses of hot rum-and-water, and the company of old bachelor merchants looked ! The disorderly second-floor, the queer, sharp-faced, sharp-tongued elder sister were not inviting objects ; but the pretty face and figure of little Rosanna—the girl who had sought my protection, and clung to me in her terror, who blushed and smiled when I spoke, who talked, it seemed, so artlessly, and had so much to be sympathized with—had opened one of those windows of life which looked into the fresh green world of youthful fancy and feeling for me, and I could neither shut nor turn my eyes away from it. In the counting-house and at the ledger, among the evening papers, in

the midst of my uncle's dry chat, I was thinking of the second-floor in Charles-street.

Jeremy became an object of great interest to me now, though he could tell nothing about the Palivez. The poor fellow thanked me with most sincere-looking gratitude for my kindness to his sisters. Sally was troubled with fits, and a little peculiar; but she had been a mother to him and to Rosanna, and she would be delighted to see and thank me any time I took the trouble to call at their poor place. No wonder he looked cowed and subjugated under the bringing-up of such a monitress; and, by a few judicious questions, I also learned from him that Sally was their step-sister, the only child of his father's first marriage, and the head of the house from her youth. "For you see," said Jeremy, "our mother was an easygoing woman, and died early."

I thought it but common civility to call and give Sally an opportunity of working off her gratitude one evening in the following week. Rosanna was sewing at the window, with her hair in papers; but she saw me, and ran to open the street-door. Sally was there, in the same old gown, with a cap to match, but looking a great deal more composed than she had looked in Wharf-street; and, in spite of the shabby attire,

and dusty, littered room, there was a strong appearance of the broken-down gentlewoman about her manner, and even in the profuse acknowledgments she made me for the trouble I had taken. She was sensible of my kindness, and very sorry for giving so much annoyance with her unfortunate nerves, but they had been shaken by severe and early trials, and she rarely went out on that account.

We talked for some time in a similar strain, I depreciating my services, she exalting them to the very skies. We were both from Ireland; but Miss Joyce had somehow got higher breeding than her younger brother and sister, and in the course of our conversation she gave me to understand, by a few judicious hints, that her mother had been a lady, who lost caste by marrying the Palivez clerk.

At this point, Rosanna, who had disappeared for some minutes, returned with her curls in full array, and a better dress on. That was done for my reception, and the girl seemed half conscious that I knew it. It was a dull life, for one so young and pretty, to lead with that queer, excitable elder sister, in a second-floor in a strange town. They had no friends, no acquaintances; Jeremy was out at his clerkship all day, Sally

rarely left the house on account of her nerves, and she did not consider it proper for her sister to go out alone. They took in plain sewing just to employ their time; not that it was necessary to them—they had saved something in Dublin—but work kept people out of mischief. Sally told me all that, with a long sigh at the end of it, and Rosanna looked down sorrowfully at her sewing. In a few minutes I got up to her side; it was to see a remarkable bird in a cage at the opposite window, and there I sat talking with the two sisters about the difference between America and the old country we had left. They knew me now to be Mr. La Touche; perhaps they knew the worst part of my family history—the Palivez and all their establishment had been inquired at in the search for Raymond—and I enlightened them on my mercantile prospects, and my determination to remain and be my uncle's heir and successor in Baltimore. Sally did the most of the responding, while she sewed on; Rosanna listened, and made believe to sew, till the daylight left us—there is little twilight in those western skies, but I sat with them till Jeremy came in. Poor fellow, he seemed overwhelmed with the honour of my visit. I was entreated to come back and see them, by

the tongue of the one sister and the eyes of the other, and went home feeling that life had a pole-star for me to steer by, and its place was the second-floor in Charles-street.

- What need of telling all the particulars at full length? I went back to see them evening after evening: at first it was once, then twice, then three times a week. I was pressed to stay for tea, and I stayed; the rooms grew less dusty, less littered to my eyes. Sally seemed less disturbed, Jeremy less overruled; if Rosanna's hair happened to be in paper, and her soiled dress on, those disadvantages were speedily removed at my advent. It was far pleasanter there than among the evening papers and the steaming punch. Odd as the family seemed to be, they were all Irish, and could laugh and make merry; at times, even Sally did her share in telling old Dublin anecdotes and doings which she remembered when the Duke of Leinster was Lord-Lieutenant. I have said that she was singularly genteel compared with the brother and sister: her presiding at the tea-table reminded me of my own mother, unlike as they were; and though the Joyces were not particular in matters of domestic order, they had evidently larger means than one could have expected from the brother's

position. I need not say that my chief attraction to their society was neither Jeremy nor his elder sister. I don't think it was altogether Rosanna's pretty face; but there was a dancing light in her blue eyes, which told of joy and gladness at my coming—there was the ever-changing colour and the irrepressible smile answering to all my words and looks. The girl loved me—I got convinced of that; maybe it was easily done, but no glance, no word of affection had reached me since I came a stranger to Baltimore, in my seventh year. Melrose Morton had been kind to my desolate childhood, and we were friends still; but the difference of our characters more than that of years, made it an unequal friendship, like that between the man and the boy. Besides, he had his home and his mother, his love of study, and a natural reserve which I could never break through.

Here was a young, artless, beautiful girl, as lonely as myself—rather worse situated, for she was a woman—and turning to me with all the unchilled, unmixed affection of her nature. I had a heart to give away in those days, one which nobody had claimed or valued till she came in my way. Was it strange that I took to the second-floor, that I became the family friend,

that I paid marked attentions, that I asked and obtained leave to take Rosanna out for walks, to lectures, to theatres, to concerts that came off in the evening—for I had no other time? In looking back now, it becomes visible to me that the younger sister and I were a good deal left together; that frequent hints of exalted relationship and high expectations were given; that there was no expense spared in dress and other provisions for my coming; but at the time the frank innocence of Rosanna's talk, her utter ignorance of the world, her evident trust in me and simple delight in every amusement I found for her, charmed me as I had never been charmed before. It was true that she could scarcely read, and wrote very badly, that she spoke in defiance of all grammar, and had to be told about proprieties of table by her superintending sister—but she pleased me to the heart, as the old song has it, and I had great dreams of making her a lady.

CHAPTER VI.

MELROSE MORTON'S ADVICE.

As a thunder-cloud comes over the summer sky, those dreams were crossed at times by the thought of what my uncle would say on the subject, if it came to his knowledge. To expect that he would countenance, or even tolerate, such a connexion for his intended heir and successor, was beyond the force of my imagination ; yet on that heir and successorship the castle of my hope was built. Thereby our family status was to be regained, my sister was to be rescued from the lonely farm-house, my once kindly but now terrible grand-aunt was to be set aside and provided for, and the transmutation of Rosanna into a gentlewoman was to be effected. I knew myself to be acting unwisely from the beginning ; the two schemes were inconsistent, and could never be made to harmonize. Many an endeavour I

made to break the spell ; perhaps they were not made soon enough, but the soft blue eyes drew me on, and I was lonely in life. My comings and goings to Charles-street were managed with great circumspection, however ; it was necessary to keep the affair from uncle ; and, friends though we had been for many a year, I felt a sort of necessity to keep it from Melrose Morton, too. He had always preached prudence and worldly wisdom to me, as became his seniority. He had known or guessed my prospects in the heir and successor line from my first coming to the grammar school ; and that unexplained knowledge of my family secret somehow helped to make me shy about confiding the secret of my heart to him. He had nothing of the kind himself, as far as I could learn—no friends, scarcely an acquaintance but me. Melrose led a student's life, though it was also that of a teacher : but he had his home and his mother, and I had nothing but the evening papers and the dry chats. I kept my secret from him, but before the first year of going to Charles-street was out, Melrose knew it. He had asked me to accompany him to the Baltimore Theatre one Saturday evening ; it was to see a new star from England—somebody who was to eclipse Mrs. Siddons, but did

not. I had made a prospective apology to Rosanna for not taking her. She had looked mortified, but said she would coax Jeremy ; he was always kind, only Sally had to go out with them ; and when we had got ourselves squeezed into the crowded gallery—Melrose would pay for no better seat at a play—there they were in the pit below, and so seated that I could not help seeing them. Rosanna looked and smiled at me ; I had made up my prudent mind not to know her, but it seemed unmanly, and could not be done.

“There is a pretty girl, Melrose !” I exclaimed, taking courage from my position among the Baltimore mob ; but he had surveyed the group before the words were spoken.

“She is pretty,” he said ; “the sister of your uncle’s third clerk, I believe.”

“You know them, then ?”

I felt my own colour rising.

“I know who they are—a family of the name of Joyce, from Dublin. What a singular-looking woman that elder sister is ! Not quite clear in her mind, I should think. They say her mother was a Jewess, a daughter of old Reubens, the noted money-lender ; and there was a story concerning her and one of the Palivez, the present madame’s uncle ; he was the elder brother

and head of the house before her father, and is gone this many a year; but old Joyce married the Jewess a considerable time before his death. They said an annuity had been settled on her and her children, and I can't imagine what has brought the family here."

Melrose was trying to talk unconcernedly, and retail the gossip he had heard; but I knew that every word was meant for my special admonition—another oozing-out of his long-hidden knowledge of Dublin matters and my family misfortunes. The name of Reubens, the Jew and the money-lender, with whom my father had taken that fatal mortgage on the widow's houses, was graven on my memory. I knew him to be long dead. There was also an explanation of the Joyces' expenditure—perhaps of why madame advised their emigration; but the story did not cling about Rosanna—her mother was no Jewess.

"That must have been Joyce's first wife," said I, gossiping in my turn; "I understand he had two, and neither the brother nor the younger sister appear to have Jewish blood in their veins."

"Oh! yes, he married a second time; the Jewess did not live long. He got no annuity nor discreditable tale, that I am aware of, with

the second Mrs. Joyce. She was a clear-starcher's daughter, and had a terrible time of it with her step-child—that wonderful-looking woman, who superintends the family still, I suppose. The young girl is pretty," said Melrose; "but it is with the beauty of the pet squirrel or the lap-dog—there is no mind, no spirit in her face. Whatever that girl is guided and led to be, she will be, and nothing more; if well guided, so much the better for herself and all concerned with her; but, Lucien, in a world like this there are ten thousand chances of her being led the contrary way, particularly under her family circumstances; and let me tell you those waxy characters are much easier to send wrong than set right.

"You have been studying her, Melrose."

I was endeavouring to sneer, for my wrath was boiling up against his concealed censorship, and in defence of my depreciated idol.

My looks must have told Melrose more than I intended, for he made no reply, and the subject was tacitly dropped between us as the curtain rose. The play proceeded, and the star shone out.

In our subsequent meetings, no reference was made to the Joyces by either party. I am not

sure that my visits to Charles-street did not become more frequent, by way of convincing myself that Morton's insinuations were groundless, and Rosanna was the only woman I could ever love. I had not clearly understood his drift in those comments on her and her family; the tone of them had displeased me—the implied knowledge of my movements, of all connected with me and mine, and watch over the same, which Melrose had no right. The friendship cooled on my side; he took no measures to warm it up, and latterly we rather avoided each other, which our different avocations enabled us to do without any visible rupture.

Almost another year had passed away. Charles-street had become one of the institutions of my life. I had ceased to wonder and rejoice at my own dexterity in avoiding my uncle's observation. Melrose, I well knew, would never play the tale-bearer under or above-board; and knowing the business was to be a long one, and myself master of the situation, I managed it with care and caution. There had been small tiffs between Rosanna and me—little suspicions, short-lived jealousies, accusations of not caring for her, tears, protestations, vows, reconciliations, and smiles again; in short, all the usual accompaniments of a prolonged

and hidden courtship ; and in the latest of our makings-up we contrived to get formally engaged.

It was the only way to quiet her jealous fears, to assure my own conscience that I was acting right by the girl, and to settle Sally's mind, which, by hints to myself, and by open attacks on her younger sister, had proved herself rather disturbed of late on the subject of my intentions. The engagement had been made in the usual form, with exchange of vows and rings. I have kept my part of the latter till this day. There were locks of hair also given and taken ; and the whole was transacted one summer evening, when we walked together in our accustomed path leading through the fields to North Point, where they fought a battle since. The business was done, and I regarded it as a new bond to look after my prospects. My uncle was uncommonly busy that season ; he was getting into the London as well as the Levantine trade, and I was making myself more than commonly useful. We had not a dry chat for some time ; but when he sent a request to see me in his private room, I thought a particular one must be intended.

"Sit down, Lucien," said he, pointing to a seat right opposite to him, and a table without letter or paper on it stood between us. "You

have reached an age which takes a young man out of guardianship, but I think it my right, as well as my duty, to warn you that you are following a dangerous course with regard to my clerk Jeremy Joyce's sister ; no man should trust himself too far, and I could not overlook such a crime as seduction."

"Seduction, sir!" said I, all the honour and conscience I had rising to the defence of my own innocence.

"Yes," said my uncle, coldly, "what else would the world expect from your intimacy with a girl in her position, I may say, of her appearance? what else will it infer, whether it got proof or not? remember that a woman's reputation may be equally destroyed by suspicion as by positive evidence. Besides, Lucien, what intentions have you in keeping the girl's company?"

"No evil ones, sir, I assure you."

"Do you mean to marry her, then?"

"I do—that is, in process of time, when I have made my way in the world, and can maintain a wife."

"You mean to marry the sister of my under-clerk, a girl without fortune, family, or education;" my uncle spoke calmly, but with a cold emphasis on every word, which roused all the

man in me. We were of the same blood ; I looked him steadily in the face and answered—

“ Yes, sir, I mean to marry Rosanna Joyce.”

“ Well, every man has a right to choose for himself in such matters,” he said, with the same business-like composure. “ I think your resolution to provide for a home and a wife before you incur such responsibilities, both prudent and praiseworthy. Of course it would be pleasant to neither of us that you should remain here ; when relations happen to differ in opinion on personal questions, distance is always advisable ; but it is fortunately in my power to offer you a situation which may be acceptable under the circumstances. The business arrangements which I have lately made with the Palivez in London, render it necessary for me to keep an agent resident in their establishment, and as you have some experience, I shall be happy to give you the appointment, should it meet your views.”

Being unprejudiced in his favour, I never could decide whether my uncle’s morality arose from principle, pride, or prudence ; but strictly moral he was, in precept and practice. I knew that an offence against virtue, such as he had named, would draw down his most signal displeasure. I was also aware, though he had never said it, that

to marry a girl without family, fortune, or education, was, in his eyes, a crime of far deeper dye ; yet his quiet and coolness on the occasion fairly took me by surprise. He must have made some discovery, either from Jeremy or his own observation ; kept a silent watch on the visits which I managed so dextrously, settled the whole affair in his mind, and prepared himself for my final decision. However he did it, the old gentleman was far better prepared than I. An explosion of wrath would not have thrown me half so far out of the game ; my heir and successorship, the prospects on which I had been congratulated, and, as it were, built up from my first coming to the grammar school, all shoved quietly away from me with nothing like a demonstration, and I left no alternative but to move far away from Rossanna, or make public acknowledgment of my altered position by looking for a situation in Baltimore, which would be somewhat difficult to find, as I had no knowledge of anything but my uncle's peculiar line of business. In the astonishment and confusion of the moment, I could get out nothing, but that I would think of it.

" Make up your mind, then, before Saturday," said my uncle, looking as if he spoke of a shipment of goods ; " it is requisite to have the ap-

pointment filled up at once; my agent must be ready to sail on the first of October; you observe this day is the second of September, and I forgot to mention that the salary is a thousand dollars, exclusive of expenses, and will be increased according to duties and desert. Good morning. I will expect your decision on Saturday."

I rose with a silent bow and left the private room.

That day was Wednesday; I had three days to decide, and not a month to prepare for a parting with Rosanna, a voyage across the Atlantic, a residence in a strange land, and a getting into a new course of life.

Had my uncle contrived the whole only to send me away from her and break up the connexion, if time and absence could do it, or did he really intend to cast me off and find another heir? Foolish pride and natural obstinacy prompted me to stay and look for another situation, by way of spiting him and remaining near Rosanna; but wiser resolutions came as I thought over the matter: let my uncle intend what he would, it was the more prudent, the more manly course to accept the offered appointment, and prove myself worthy of the choice I had made by working honestly and independently for it.

Early desolation and strangership had taught me to be my own adviser. Melrose Morton had lost caste with me since the observations he made at the theatre ; yet the kindness he had shown me, and the respect I had for him, rendered a disclosure requisite. I told him all, in a walk we took for the purpose up the river's bank, where we used to walk in school time. He listened without a word : but there was a look of painful memory or concern in his face, like that of the day when he warned me not to speak of my lost brother, and at the close, he said, " Lucien, are you really determined to marry the girl ? is there any promise or engagement between her and you ? "

I felt my own face growing very red—being yet honest and not twenty-three—as I answered, " Yes, I am really determined ; Rosanna is the only woman I can ever love ; I believe she loves me, and we are engaged. "

Melrose looked at me as if I had been announcing my determination to sail in a condemned ship, but said, with his accustomed kindness, " Well, it is a very good chance, this offer of your uncle : his agency in London may be a valuable situation in the course of time, and make you independent of him and everybody

else. Absence, they say, is the strongest test of affection; you will see more of the world, and Rosanna will grow older and wiser as well as yourself."

The rest of his talk was in the same strain, kindly, sensible, and encouraging, as I always found it, except on that night at the play; it confirmed my resolution to decide in the affirmative, and on Friday morning that fact was communicated to my uncle with the best grace I could assume.

"Very well," said he, without looking up from the prices current; "you will be ready to sail on the first of October with the 'Franklin,' a capital vessel, I understand."

The last part of the settlement was telling it to Rosanna. I never looked to her for counsel or assistance in any difficulty, and I dreaded the consequences of the disclosure too much to enter on it hastily. When all was arranged and I must go, I told her the true state of the case; how I had lost my uncle's favour, and probably would never be his heir, but should remain faithful and constant to her in spite of time and distance; should work and save to get a comfortable house for her in London, and come some day to marry and take her home to it.

It was sore trial to see my poor girl's grief; how she wept, and clung to me, and cried, what would become of her when I was gone? I got her soothed at last, we exchanged vows once more, promised never to forget, and always write to each other—I did the most of the promising, for she was jealous of the London ladies, and my thinking small of her when I saw their finery and riches. That happened in our meeting-place, under the sheltering maples in Grove-lane, but there was a far more noisy scene at home on my next visit, when Sally worked herself into a fit, with the certainty that men were all deceivers, that I was going away to get off with my engagement, that her sister's heart would be broken, and their family disgraced before all Baltimore. She, too, was quieted at last, but not till our engagement was solemnly renewed in her presence; she had required either an immediate wedding or a direct breaking off; but the impropriety of the first being proved to her, and the second being utterly refused, we got her settled on the renewal, with the help of brother Jeremy.

There were similar demonstrations, but of less intensity, under the maples, and in the second-floor; they passed, however, with the days; I

made my preparations, strong in hope and in the faith of that first love. It was hard to part with Rosanna, but I was going to do a man's duty, and fill a man's place in the world, to be no longer a dependent and a waiter on an old man's will; let me acknowledge it was no hardship to leave her elder sister behind me, yet my own tears fell fast when I clasped the weeping girl to my heart for the last time, under the green maples; we had chosen to part in that trysting-spot, in the soft summer evening, and she sobbed out, "Lucien, dear Lucien, don't forsake me for one of the fine London ladies."

Melrose Morton would see me on board the 'Franklin.' My uncle had bid me good-bye before he went to his counting-house that morning, and hoped I would have a pleasant voyage. It proved to be a long one, even for that period, but I do not intend to relate its incidents. Adventures there were none; but we were out nearly three months, being detained by contrary winds, and I arrived safe in London, with letters of introduction to the house of Palivez, and full powers of agency, but too late to enter on business till the festival was over, so it happened that I sat in the corner of the coffee-room, and

heard my own family's woeful history told to a stranger that Christmas-day.

When I could think over it no more, and afternoon customers began to drop in—they were mostly Russians or Eastern men who frequented that old-fashioned coffee-house—when the fog deepened into that early night which falls upon London in its great pudding time, I rose and retired to the family hotel in Finsbury-place, which my uncle had assigned for my rest, because it was kept by a correspondent of the Quaker lady in Baltimore. There I had my solitary Christmas dinner, and wrote a long letter to Rosanna, to assure her of my safe arrival, my good hope of getting on in London, and my unchanging memory of her, in spite of my uncle's disfavour and the parting sea.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANKER - LADY.

Old Broad-street, where so much Eastern business is still done, and Greek names may be read on every door, as they have been since Elizabeth's time, looked much the same when I pulled the porter's bell at a building which then stood opposite Gresham House, and was known to all City men as Palivez' Bank. The premises have been taken down and remodelled so that their former occupants would not recognise them, but at the time of my story, though presenting an English front with bank office and chambers properly windowed to the public of Old Broad-street, the central and rearward parts remained much as they had been constructed by the original owner, a wealthy Jew, who had the good fortune to remove from Granada in the days of Philip the Second, while the edict of banishment

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against all his race was yet brewing in the mind of the Catholic king and his priestly advisers. The Jew's family were long extinct in England. Great firms, chiefly in the Eastern trade, had successively occupied his house, lived and done business there as Eastern firms are apt to do till the present day.


There was a saying in the City that nobody had ever lost money or reared children within its walls, the successive firms had died out or removed to their native lands in wealth and age, and now it was tenanted by the last of the Palivez, one of the wealthiest spinsters in Europe, and highly reputed among mercantile men for abilities to hold her own, and increase the riches and honours of the heirless house. My uncle had sent two letters of introduction with me by way of credentials, one was addressed to Samuel Esthers, Esq., the ostensible manager, and the other to Madame Palivez herself.

His commands to deliver it first had been stringent. I had also received strict orders to get to business as soon as possible, so I rang the porter's bell at the private door on the morning after Christmas, and was admitted by a grey-haired man with a decidedly Greek face, clad in a sort of tunic, girt round the waist with a shawl

of many colours, and loose pantaloons which were never made in England. To him I presented my card and the letter of introduction to madame ; he took them without a word, touched a bell which rang far away in the interior, another servant immediately appeared who, with an Eastern bow, but also in profound silence, opened a door at one side of the passage—by-the-bye, it was beautifully painted and paved with black and white marble—and showed me into a waiting-room fitted up in the best style of old-fashioned comfort and elegance. There I sat beside a bright fire, looked at some half-dozen portraits on the walls—they were full-length and evidently family pictures, for all had the same cast of features, every one Greek, but of the strongest and sternest type—that Hercules might have looked when preparing for his twelve labours, for there was something of desperate resolution against unfriendly stars in all their looks ; they appeared to have been taken at middle life, and their semi-eastern costumes belonged to different ages, but the great preponderance of fur proved that they had been dwellers in the north. I had made these observations when the servant returned “Madame Palivez will see the signor,” he said, in a foreign accent. Let me observe that his attire

was still more Oriental than that of the porter, he wore a purple tunic and a broad amber sash, I rose and followed him through the passage across a central court roofed with glass ; there were parterres of beautiful flowers, a marble fountain in the middle, many windows looking into it, a broad marble stair with a gilt bannister led to the first floor ; folding doors, half of painted glass, opened on a lofty hall hung round with portraits similar to those in the waiting-room, but more numerous, and some ladies among them.

Its mosaic pavement and walls painted in Arabesque, the deep silence which seemed to reign throughout the mansion, and the ante-room, all hung with old Byzantine tapestry, into which my guide conducted me, had a new and strange effect on my fancy, which was rather heightened when he drew aside one of the massive curtains and ushered me through a carved and gilt archway into a large apartment with high windows of stained glass opening into a conservatory, from which I caught the odour of exotic flowers ; the walls and ceiling richly painted with scenes from Eastern lands ; the floor covered with Turkish carpeting, a bright wood fire burning on a marble hearth ; the furniture composed of large sofas, small tables, bookcases, mirrors, and immense



vases filled with flowers. Almost in the centre, on a sofa nearly opposite the fire and full in the light, with a richly carved writing-table before her, there sat a lady dressed in a gown or pelisse of purple velvet, closely-fitting and ornamented with gold buttons; hair arranged in long braided bands looped up with gold pins, and a net of the same shining thread. I know not what her age might have been; she was not young, she was not old. The jet black hair shone without a touch of grey; the full dark eyes—I could never settle whether they were black or brown—had a lively brightness like that of early youth; there was not a wrinkle, not a trace of Time's raven footsteps on the straight open brow and smooth cheek.

She might have been called a fair brunette, if such terms can go together, her complexion was so clearly brown. Her features were finely chiselled as those of an antique statue, and of the true Grecian mould, without angle or depression. Her figure was round and full, with sloping shoulders and well-proportioned waist, like those of the classic Venus. There was more of the matron than the maid about it, yet, nothing heavy or large. When she rose and bent to me, I saw that her height was about

middle size, and there was a native grace in all her actions.

“Good morning, Mr. La Touche; please to take a seat,” she said, motioning me to a sofa near her own. “The voice was feminine and sweet, but there was a firm tone in it, and the accent sounded slightly foreign. “I am obliged to your uncle, Mr. O’Neil, for affording me the pleasure of an introduction. He is an old and valued acquaintance of our house, and I trust you will make yourself at home here.”

I made my best acknowledgments. She inquired kindly after my uncle’s health; expressed her great esteem for him, though she had only seen Mr. O’Neil once, and that was many years ago, when business brought him to Dublin. As far as her memory served, she thought I resembled him, but slightly. My own recollection and the opposite mirror both assured me of the fact. I did not resemble my uncle much, and as the Americans say, did not want to, though he evidently stood on high ground with Madame Palivez. From Mr. O’Neil, the lady passed to his business and Baltimore trade in general, and I will confess never to have been more astonished in my life than I was at her intimate knowledge of the whole matter.


Had Madame been clerking in my uncle's counting-house instead of me, she could not have been better acquainted with the transactions of the firm; indeed, there were some secrets of my uncle's policy to which I had never attained, evidently known to her. Yet, while she talked so easily and kindly, the lady was taking my measure. I could not say what made me aware of it; she did not scrutinize me, she did not ask me questions, on the contrary, she looked and spoke as if we had known each other for years; yet there was no intimacy, no partiality in her manner. It was friendly, but that of a superior; not patronising, not condescending, but something which I had never met before in man or woman, and on which I could never presume. Yet she was taking notes of me, person and mind. It might have been her business like habit with all men; but the impression made me confused, and I fear foolish.

"Your uncle," she said at length, "mentions that his agency will admit of your taking a clerkship here. Our manager, Mr. Esthers—you have brought an introduction to him I believe—requires an English clerk just now. Should the situation suit you, its duties are not very laborious, they will allow you time to transact your

uncle's business ; the remuneration may be of use to you and our clerks generally board on the premises."

There was the cause of my being surveyed and canvassed. The Palivez always kept a native clerk, and I was appointed to fill the position which Jeremy Joyce had occupied in their Dublin establishment. My uncle had told me nothing of that. It did not consist with Mr. O'Neil's policy that his discarded nephew should know he was making such interest for him ; but as madame had remarked, the remuneration would be of use to me. Board on the premises was something to a man without friends or a home in London, and I gathered sufficient composure to say I should be happy to accept the situation, and discharge its duties to the best of my abilities.

"No doubt," said madame, "you will give our manager every satisfaction. Mr. Esthers is an experienced man of business ; punctual and regular himself, he expects similar conduct from all his assistants, but I am sure you have had such excellent training in Mr. O'Neil's office as will make you an acquisition to his, and I believe you will find him kind and considerate. Our place of business is in the front, opening on



Old Broad-street. This side of the house is my private residence, but you will easily see the bank entrance, and the porter will show you our manager's room."

I was expected to go; madame had seen enough of me; so I rose and took my leave in some haste and some confusion. She rang a bell hard by her sofa; the same silent servant appeared, conducted me back to the porter's domain, the door was noiselessly opened at my approach, and I found myself again in Old Broad-street.

One ordeal was passed, but there was another to get through. The letter of introduction to Samuel Esthers, Esq., still in my pocket, was probably addressed to the very man I had seen in the Greek Coffee-house, hearing the details of my family misfortune from Watt Wilson. Well, many must have heard it besides him, and the letter must be presented; the clerkship and the agency put together would give good returns, and enable me to marry Rosanna. Strange that I should have come across the Atlantic to fill her brother's place, and serve the Madame Palivez she did not like!

It seemed to me that I did not like the woman either, as I walked a little way along the pave-

ment to re-assure myself and to collect my thoughts.

She had received me courteously, even kindly, considering the difference of our positions, yet I felt relieved to get fairly out of her presence. The silent, half Oriental magnificence which surrounded her in those out-of-the-world back rooms—it was somehow impossible to call them that, but who could have imagined they were in the heart of London?—her singular beauty, her unascertainable age, beyond my own so far, yet not to be thought old; her knowledge of business—it seemed complete mastery of it—so extraordinary in a woman; her manner of speech somewhat antiquated, somewhat scholarly; her foreign accent, her queenly air—all had made an impression upon me, which I could neither shake off nor reconcile myself to.

The bank entrance was easily seen—it was right in front, while the private door of that great house opened at the corner; and no greater contrast would have been found in all the world than the place of business presented to the private residence. The former was entirely after the London fashion, but newer, larger, and better furnished than private banking establishments were wont to be in those

days. The porter showed me the manager's office, a very comfortable business room, where I waited a few minutes, and took a general survey, till, according to my expectation, in stepped the very man to whom Wilson had told our story in the coffee-house. Of course we were perfect strangers, yet I thought he recognised me after the same manner as I did him. I was received civilly, requested to take a seat, and when he had read my uncle's letter, which did not occupy him long, Mr. Esthers formally shook hands with me, and said he was happy to see Mr. O'Neil's nephew. He supposed I understood the business well, and would be inclined to take a clerkship in the bank; my uncle's agency could not occupy all my time, and any active man could fill the two situations. I declared my willingness, on which Mr. Esthers entered into particulars. The salary was one hundred, with board on the premises, but it might be increased. The English clerk worked in his office, himself had a private room of course; the business hours were from ten till five, but sometimes extra work required extra time. I was aware of that, no doubt from experience in my uncle's counting-house. Mr. O'Neil was a superior man of business, and he

had a great respect for him. The manager talked of "our house" exactly as madame had done, but his glory in it appeared to be far greater. His civility to me and his esteem for my uncle were equally made manifest, but Mr. Esthers patronized us both. He took as much note of me as his lady-superior did, but it was taken with keen, scrutinizing looks and probing questions. Did I like business? Did I prefer America or England? How could my uncle spare me? Had he got an assistant in my room? Had I any acquaintances in London? And should I go to Ireland in the holidays to visit my relations? Nobody in their bank got any but three weeks, given some time after St. John's Day, according as he could spare them.

Having satisfied the mighty manager's curiosity on those subjects, and a good many more bordering on my uncle's transactions and my own agency, I concluded the interview by agreeing to all his terms of work and salary, getting three days to see the sights of London and introduce myself to my uncle's brokers. Mr. Esthers gave me hints of their sharpness, and the difficulties I would find in dealing with London people generally, and wished me a very good morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

LUCIEN AND MR. ESTHERS.

I SAW the sights, and also the brokers. The latter consisted of two Greeks and one American, none of them a whit less sharp than I had been admonished to expect, but indispensable to my uncle. The Levantine merchants with whom he dealt were in the habit of paying him in kind, a practice not uncommon yet in that line of trade. The raw silk, dry fruit, and Turkey leather, which they sent in exchange for his tobacco and other American wares, could be frequently sold to better advantage in London than in Baltimore. It was the brokers' business to manage such transactions, but my uncle never trusted anybody entirely, and entire confidence in those gentlemen might not have been the most prudent course. Some one on the spot to look after his interest, and act as a

counter-check, was requisite. Hence my agency supplemented by the clerkship in Palivez' bank, which also took and kept me away from Rossanna. I felt convinced that everything had been arranged chiefly for that purpose; but our persecutors—in which category I now reckoned the entire house in Old Broad-street madame and her manager included—should see that our true love would stand the test of time and separation. For her sake I would accept the position as the best attainable for the present, and be on the look-out for something better and more independent of my uncle and his friends.

I wrote a great deal to her on that subject. There was a long letter penned every evening for some time, and sent *en masse*, regardless of the heavy postage which then prevailed, by the first packet. They unburdened my mind and cheered my heart; and the next American mail brought me one from her, addressed by Jeremy, very ill written and worse spelled, but full of her sorrow for my absence, and warnings not to forget her.

In the meantime, I entered on the combined duties of agent and clerk, got into harness on the appointed morning by sending my trunk

to the bed-room assigned to me on the fourth-floor above the bank, making my appearance in Mr. Esthers' office just as the clock struck ten, and signifying that I had come to be his most obedient servant.

Under my uncle's excellent training, as madame called it—I never could get that woman's words out of mind—habits of business had become as second nature to me, and they are much the same in bank or counting-house. I found no difficulty in falling into the new track; Mr. Esthers, though punctual and regular to an extreme degree, was not a hard master; indeed, but for a strong leaning he had to showing people the worst side of everything that concerned themselves, and an appearance of secret oversight and more than requisite reticence, he was easy and even agreeable to work under. From my first coming he showed me a good deal of civility, and very little of his superiority as manager; seemed rather inclined to take me into confidence on the extent of the firm's transactions, and the heavy responsibility which consequently rested on him, gave me every information, every facility for my own part of the work, was disposed to chat with me familiarly about City men and matters, on which he had

an immense stock of anecdotes and details not generally known. Working in the same office, and well inclined towards each other, Mr. Esthers and I could not fail to get tolerably intimate, yet, as it had been with my uncle, so it was with him, I could never feel at home.

The effect arose from different causes, for Esthers was a different man. Though some fifteen years my senior, of far larger experience, and in high authority, there was nothing about him to inspire that awe and deference which the merchant O'Neil, with his high-bred manner and look of more than princely descent, which he claimed, inspired even American citizens, and kept my youth in fear. 'The Palivez' manager was in speech and bearing every inch a mercantile clerk, and nothing more. Beyond bank and business affairs, his education was extremely limited, except that he had considerable fluency in the use of three languages—English, Russiac, and modern Greek. I had no impression of his being my superior in anything but position; yet something about the man and his ways warned me that there was a side of his character I had not seen, and some circumstances confirmed me in that belief before we had been long acquainted.


In the first place, I observed that while he gave me hints at times very dim and distant, but sufficient to let me know that he was aware of my family's peculiar history, Mr. Esthers never so much as mentioned Watt Wilson, with whom he must have been on intimate terms, and appeared to know nothing of Forbes, the banker, whose name occasionally turned up in our business transactions. Secondly, I found out by the merest accident—by-the-bye, it was a bit of a torn letter which he had not completely burned—that the manager was in close correspondence with my uncle, and the fragmentary words I could decipher made me suspect that he had the supervision of my agency. Perhaps it was not to be expected that the old gentleman in Baltimore could confide in a nephew whose elder brother had set him such an example of dishonour. At how many points of my life would that ruinous remembrance meet me? It kept me solitary and sober in the British capital, as it had done in the American town, and notwithstanding the change of place and scene, my surroundings seemed to have taken the very same colour.

The establishment in Old Broad-street was not exactly like the Quaker lady's boarding-house; it consisted of six clerks, besides myself,

two Russians, two Polish Jews, one Armenian, and, strange to say, only one Greek. He was the oldest man in the house, and next to Esthers in power and trust. None of the rest were young; they had been long in the service and could speak English, but all were reserved, taciturn men. When they did converse it was among themselves, in Russiac, or modern Greek, and generally in low, monotonous tones. The Jews and the Russians sat apart at table—so did the Armenian and the Greek; and each race exhibited the observances of their respective rituals as regarded viands and the disposal of them.

Probably those differences helped to make them an unsocial company, for such they were; none of them liked the manager, and he liked none of them; but that was to be guessed at, not seen. I think they did not like me either; but Esthers informed me they never would like an English clerk; and I also learned from him, though I can't say he wished me to know it, that his cherished ambition was to be thought British born, and neither a Jew nor a foreigner.

The great house accommodated us all well, and we had but the front of it—the ground-floor for business, the first for the manager's private



apartments, and our dining and sitting rooms ; above that, three floors of bedrooms—for every clerk had one to himself—and all looking out on Old Broad-street, for we had no back windows ; there a solid wall divided us from the central court-yard, and prevented the possibility of a peep at madame's private residence. The Spanish Jew was said to have constructed that mansion out of a nunnery which had occupied the site, and fallen to ruin before the Reformation time. I know the sunk-flat was deep, but apparently well furnished, and inhabited by the house-keeper, with three domestic servants, all discreet women, not young, and rather foreign-looking. Madame Oniga, the matron in authority, was a large, tall woman, about fifty, always clad in a gown of black cloth, and a velvet cap trimmed with silver lace ; she had a good many silver rings on her fingers, a Greek cross of the same metal, and a black rosary hung at her left side ; on the right they were balanced by an immense bunch of keys, which rattled as she moved about. Madame Oniga was a Russian born, and, I think, rather proud of the fact. She had the half-Tartar features of the race, and that masculine look which Russian women somehow acquire in advanced life. The woman rarely spoke to any-

body above ground, whatever she did in the sunk-flat ; our domestic affairs were well regulated under her management, the cooking was considerable and various, as four creeds had to be suited, and Mr. Esthers would eat nothing but English dishes, and I partly followed his example. I am not sure how it came to my knowledge, but he was no favourite with Madame Oniga, any more than with the clerks. They were almost equal sovereigns, the one having charge of domestic, and the other of business matters. To an outside observer, Mr. Esthers' authority would have seemed weighty and extensive ; it was only through being employed in the house that I came to know the great amount of capital it could command, and the important transactions it had, not alone with commercial firms at home and abroad, but also with princes and cabinets. Its credits and its loans were beyond anything I had dreamt of ; its management was like clockwork ; and its information on mercantile affairs, and all that bordered on the same, most accurate, and sent through private channels, the bearings of which I never knew. But over the bank, and over its managers—yea, over the housekeeper and over all arrangements public and private—there was the invisible

but constant and personal superintendence of the lady beyond the wall. She did not come often within our view: at times we saw her passing to the manager's office, or taking a slight survey of the premises, by way of making her presence publicly known.

On these progresses she deigned to notice me, but not particularly. Madame Palivez knew all her clerks, after the manner of a lady proprietor and head of the house. Sometimes an important client saw her on business in the manager's room. She did not appear often; but there was a passage and door of communication, always locked in the inside, and communicating at once with the corridor leading along the side of the court-yard to her apartments, and with a stair shut in by a fire-proof door, and leading down to the vaults, which may have belonged to the ancient nunnery, and now held the archives and pledges kept by the house of Palivez. Esthers told me there was amongst the latter, plate belonging to a Greek Emperor of Constantinople, and jewels that had been worn by the first Czarina of the Vasiliewilseh line; but he did not tell me what I very well knew before a month's residence in the establishment, namely—that he could not do and scarcely say any-

thing without consulting and being directed by madame. I believe he would have died rather than acknowledge the fact, though every soul about the house was perfectly aware it. Indeed, when I was yet a fresh man in his office, he almost gave me to understand that the real authority resided with him; madame was but the nominal head, being only a woman, and not competent for business; but something in my look, or in his own shrewd sense, must have shown him that it would not do, for he never returned to the subject, and spoke of his sovereign lady as seldom as possible.

Shrewd and sensible Esthers was beyond the wont of cunning people, to which order the manager emphatically belonged. Within the limits of his knowledge and understanding, few could have given better council. No knave but himself could have imposed on Esthers, but his life laboured under strange and discordant burdens. I did not know their full weight then, but our close association in work and living made one thing evident to me. The commonplace, underbred little man had in him a hidden hoard of pride and ambition, sleepless and unquenchable as the subterranean fires; though not very high-pitched, the summits to which

they aspired were mercantile wealth and influence. The acknowledged and uncontrollable head of a first-rate firm was his beau ideal of power and glory. To achieve that position, Esthers would have done anything; but there was no likelihood of his craving after it ever being satisfied, and he appeared to owe all the world ill-will in consequence. I never heard him speak in hearty praise of anybody. His countenance indicated that he was no philanthropist; and except one foolish woman—where is the man who cannot find such?—I never knew a soul who had the smallest liking for Esthers.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. WILSON OFFERS A LITTLE EXPLANATION.

My arrival in London was signalized by several angry letters for throwing away good prospects, and being able to do nothing for my family, dictated by my grand-aunt, and written by my sister. The well-disposed but ill-educated girl contrived to slip in at the end of every epistle, "dear Lucien, my aunt mad me write this, but I was sorry to do it, and I hope you will excuse your effectionate sister." Poor Rhoda! her orthography was not worse than that of my Rosanna, but her rescue from the farmhouse, and better schooling, occupied less of my attention now. Things must take their course, and it was a far cry to the Antrim shore. The angry letters and the kindly post-script were briefly, I fear coldly, answered. I worked for my uncle and the Palivez. I learned

the peculiarities of the place and the people. I wished to make acquaintance with Watt Wilson, to acknowledge my family debt to his employer, Mr. Forbes, but shrunk from attempting either, on account of the memories it must bring up, and the reflections that might be made on my own altered position.

Some weeks had gone this way, when, crossing the passage to the office one morning—Mr. Esthers was indisposed and had not come down yet—I saw Wilson himself coming forward to meet me.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. La Touche,” said the kindly old clerk, looking half glad and half surprised, “your name is written in your face, as one may say; I never saw a son so like a father.”

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Wilson,” said I extending my hand.

“God bless you, sir,” and he shook it warmly; “I did not think you would remember me so well: what a fine man you have grown! I would have called upon you sooner but I have been in Ireland. Mr. Forbes was kind enough to give me a holiday just after Christmas, and I went to see the old place, and look after an orphan family of nephews and

nieces I have there. Mr. Forbes sent his compliments to you, sir," he continued, when we had sat down in the retirement of the empty office ; " he wants you to come to his house and be acquainted with him. He is a good man and a good friend to you and yours ; you may know that partly, but not so well as I do."

" Oh, yes, Mr. Wilson, I am sensible of the great kindness he has shown to my family, and would have called to make my acknowledgments, but——"

" He says it was his part to call on you, sir, and maybe it was ; I am not up to the high rules of manners, but Mr. Forbes is such a shy nervous man, though he has been in public business all his life. They say it was the death of his wife and two sons that gave him such a shake ; it happened the very year before he left Dublin," said Wilson, but I knew what he had been about to say. " Mr. Forbes never got the better of that, sir, and I am afraid never will, he is such a feeling man. I wouldn't speak of it to anybody else, but it is my opinion, Mr. La Touche, that gentleman has grieved as much over your family's trouble as ever one of you did. You can't think what a frightened look was in his face when he asked me in private

if I thought you were at all like the poor boy that was lost—‘like the eldest brother,’ he said in a kind of a whisper; he would go ten miles about rather than mention the boy’s name. I suppose it is thoughts of his own sons that come on him, though none of them were so far grown, only ten and twelve I understand, both at school, and taken with the scarlet fever three months after their mother. She died of rapid consumption, poor woman, and he has neither chick nor child but Miss Helen, the best young lady in the world, but not much to look at, which is a pity, for she will be heiress of all his gatherings. They must be considerable, Mr. La Touche, for he lives in a plain, private way, though except the house you are in, and one or two more, there is not a better banking business in London. It must go to strangers I suppose when he is called away.”

“Has Forbes no relations, then?” I enquired.

“None but distant ones living in Edinburgh; he brought up an orphan nephew, the son of his sister, who married an ensign in Dublin, sore against his will, for the boy was not steady, and partly broke her heart, they say: at any rate she lived only five years after her marriage

—and Mr. Forbes has her son to provide for. When the ensign went to Spain with his regiment and was killed at Salamanca, he put him to school, and brought him up as if he had been his own child. Would have left him the business, I'll warrant, but like father, like son, Master Charles, that was his name, would settle at nothing but running away to sea, which he did before he was fifteen, got into a man-of-war as a cabin boy, and couldn't or wouldn't be got out again. There he is to this day, a sailor; Mr. Forbes has made interest for him and got him promoted to be third mate or something of that kind—a brave, handsome fellow, I am told—but he can't be got to come and see them for the best of invites, being ashamed of his doings, I suppose; he says he will never come till he is made a captain, and that is like to be a good while. But I am running on, sir, and forgetting to give you Mr. Forbes' message: he sends his compliments to you, and will be much obliged if you will come to dine with him on Friday evening, without ceremony. 'Tell him, Wilson,' said he, 'my daughter and I are not people of fashion, but we will be happy to make his acquaintance, and do him any service we can.' Mr. La Touche,

he is the kindest man and the best master that ever lived—not to speak of his friendship to your family—and I hope you'll go ; the house is not far, only two miles from London, on the Uxbridge road ; quite a mansion ; they call it Notting Hill House ; a pretty place, though it is old and rather lonely ; you pass through the village of Notting Hill to it, and anybody will show you the way.

I expressed my thanks to Mr. Forbes, and my intention to accept his kind invitation, if the hours of business permitted.

"Oh, yes, sir," said Wilson, "I forgot to tell you that they never dine till six ; the coach, that goes from the Bank to Tyburn-gate every half hour, will take you most of the way ; they don't keep a carriage, or Mr. Forbes would send it for you."

"He is too kind," said I.

"He is kind to everybody, sir, and more particularly to you and yours, but—" and Wilson looked slightly confused, "there is something I ought to tell you about, in his mind. You won't take offence at an old friend—an old follower, I may say ; but when I was in Ireland I went to see Miss Livey and your sister. I should have done it any way, but Mr. Forbes made me pro-

mise I would, because the old woman had been writing to him, saying how hard-up they were, and that you could do nothing now; not that he has let them want, goodness knows; but between ourselves, Miss Livey is getting very shaky in her understanding, and gives poor Miss Rhoda little life.

“Is not she the fine handsome girl, the very model of her mother?—it did my eyes good to see her, and so easy-going and contented like in the midst of her bother, not entirely with Miss Livey, though that would be plenty; but you see, Mr. Hughes, your father’s cousin, married that housekeeper of his last year, and when women get married they will have their say. She and Miss Livey never had a good agreement, and now she wants that bit of the house they have for a sister of hers that is left a widow, and Mr. Hughes wouldn’t be sorry to see their backs turned either, though it ill becomes him, after your father’s kindness; but this is a forgetful world. However, Mr. La Touche, I brought word of it all, as I was bound to do by the wishes of both parties, to Mr. Forbes. I know he means to do something particular for them and you. ‘Wilson,’ said he, when I was done telling him, ‘the best thing for all the

family would be to come here and keep a home for Lucien. I'll engage that none of them will ever want while I have a shilling to spare; there are nice cheap houses to be got in the neighbourhood of London, and they could be looked after there better than in Ireland. It is far off, and there are three helpless women.'

"He was right there, Mr. La Touche; you see Miss Livey has taken that poor thing, Hannah Clark, the last of the widow's daughters; you would not have her left behind, unprovided for as she is, and I know Mr. Forbes will let no heavy burden lie on your shoulders; that's what he is going to speak to you about, sir, and I thought it better to let you know in time."

My first feeling was not one of gratitude to the honest clerk and his kindly master for their solution of my family difficulties. With such a household hanging on me, how was my engagement with Rosanna ever to be fulfilled? But Wilson's last words reminded me that it was my young sister, my poor old aunt, and the last of Widow Clark's dumb and defrauded daughters who were to be considered. Mr. Forbes was right; they would be more easily and suitably supported with myself, than far off in Ireland. My present salary would be sufficient to keep a

home for them in some cheap neighbourhood of London, without his assistance ; it went against my mind, perhaps against my pride, that a stranger should help to maintain my relations, friendly and generous as he had proved himself.

My duty was clear—to take up the burden, and leave the rest to Providence. Besides, like all men of a domestic nature, there was comfort in the prospect of a home and household, whatever its discrepancies might be. I was tired of the unameliorated barrack life which had been my portion in the Baltimore boarding-house and the London bank. I had looked to a different housekeeping, but that could not be for years. What would Rosanna—what would her sister say? Our affection was to be tested in earnest, yet how would it stand the wear and tear of life, if it did not outlast this trial? And once more my duty was clear. I told Wilson so on the spot, and thanked him for acquainting me with the matter, before meeting Mr. Forbes.

“I would do a deal more than that, sir, for your father’s son, indeed ; he bid me tell you,” said the honest clerk, “it’s himself that is the real friend to your family ; but, Mr. La Touche, you’ll not be offended with an old follower—I have saved something, having never married,

you see, and it's quite at your service any time."

I thanked Wilson once again; we shook hands over it, and thus made a formal renewal of the old allegiance and sovereignty which had never passed out of Wilson's memory; he was still the clerk, and I was his master's son—his young master in fact, notwithstanding the present equality of our positions. "But, dear me," said the honest soul, as we came to the end of the ceremony, "I am forgetting to inquire after Mr. Esthers; it's seldom one sees the office clear of him in the morning."

I explained the cause of the manager's absence.

"Ay," said Wilson, with a sympathizing shake of his head, "his health is delicate with sitting too close at the desk, I judge, Mr. Lucien," there was a sign of confirmed loyalty which Wilson never more dropped; "he is the steady man, a kind of an example, I may say; between ourselves, if he wasn't of use, I don't think Madame would keep him as a manager, though he is her cousin. She is a wonderful woman for an eye to business; Mr. Forbes tells me he has dealt with the house these four-and-twenty years, and he will be bound there is not

a cheque paid she don't know of, for all so grand and private as she keeps herself.

"He says she did the same in her father's time, when the bank was in Castle-street, in Dublin; the house they had there was nearly as large as this one; they built most of it themselves, nearly a hundred years ago, when they first came from Amsterdam, and the finest part, where they lived in state, and saw no company just as she does here, I am told, was at the back, and opened into Greek-alley. I am not sure that it was not named in their honour; you can't recollect it, Mr. Lucien, never having been in Dublin, and it is not there now; they altered and partly pulled down the place, about seven years ago, to build the Royal Hotel—that is the house for charges—but, as I was saying, Greek-alley is closed up and gone, though it was convenient to the Palivez, and for that matter, to all passengers, being a kind of short-cut round their house from Castle-street to the Liberties.

"Madame used to come and go that way on her Arabian horse: all the Dublin people talked about her riding, and no wonder, for I never saw a woman so much at home in the saddle. She gallops past Mr. Forbes' house every day in the summer time, to and from a sort of country-seat

she keeps down at the end of Kensington Park, a lonely place, but very pretty and foreign like ; no expense spared on it, you see ; she is a wonderful woman ; have you ever seen her, Mr. Lucien ?”

“ Yes, Madame Palivez received me when I called to deliver a letter of introduction from my uncle.”

“ Oh ! to be sure, she has a great respect for Mr. O’Neil, they have had long dealings together ; didn’t you think her very grand and handsome ?—all the young gentlemen do.”

“ Well, yes ;” I wanted to get, not give intelligence, “ she has a Greek face, of course ; is Mr. Esthers her cousin ?”

“ He told me so once ; it was a kind of a let out,” said Wilson. “ I don’t know how it comes, there is not much likeness between them ;” and the rest of his reflections were cut short by their subject walking into the office.

I thought Esthers looked disconcerted at the first sight of Wilson, but he recovered himself instantly, shook hands in a most friendly manner, and inquired familiarly after the health of Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen.

“ They are both well, thank you,” said Wilson.

"I have been calling with their compliments to Mr. La Touche here."

Once more the manager looked disconcerted, and once more shook it off; said he was happy to hear of Mr. Forbes and his daughter being well. They were excellent people, though he wondered the young lady wasn't afraid to live in that lonely place. He hoped Mr. Wilson would mention that he had been inquiring for them, which the clerk promised to do. Then Esthers sounded my praises in his own peculiar style. I was new yet to London business, and had not been accustomed to such a house as theirs, but he was sure I would learn in time; nothing like experience bought. And after some talk on mercantile news, and a declaration that Mr. Forbes would expect me on Friday, Wilson took his leave.

"You are going to call on Forbes?" said the manager, in his inquisitive, patronising way, as soon as the door closed behind him.

"He has asked me to dine with them," said I.

It was spoken in the pride of rising fortune, for the wealthy banker was an acquaintance for a friendless clerk to boast of. But I was not prepared for the scowl of malignant anger which darkened Esthers' face, half turned

away as it was, and supposed to be invisible to me.

“You won’t meet very lively society there,” he continued, in a cool, unconcerned tone, while he unfolded a large paper, and made believe to look over it. “Forbes is a good sort of a man, but a regular Scotch Presbyterian—strict and sour—and has brought up his daughter to be the same. I don’t know why they live in that out-of-the-world place, nor what he is saving his money for. People say it is to get an earl’s son for Miss Helen. They are both so proud, father and daughter, nobody good enough to associate with them, if there is the least thing to be said against their utmost generation ; I wonder they take notice of you ?”

“Mr. Forbes has always shown himself a friend to my family.”

“In spite of all that happened !—well, that’s wonderful ! Does he know of your engagement in Baltimore ? He will give you good advice about that. There is nobody so set against low matches as these saving Scotchmen. Where is that pocket-book of mine ?” and Mr. Esthers departed in search of his conveniency, leaving me in an inward tempest of indignation and amazement, but the latter predominant. What

ends had he for ferreting out my private affairs ? I felt sure my uncle had not told him ; it was not Mr. O'Neil's fashion to tell the like of his nephew, and why was he so disturbed and angry at my going to the Forbes ? Those questions could not be asked of one's manager. Mr. Esthers probably thought he had said enough on the subject, for I heard no more of it, and on the appointed Friday evening took my way to Notting Hill.

CHAPTER X.

MISS FORBES AND HER FATHER.

ON Friday, as I said, I soon found my way to Notting Hill. The place is now a large and handsome suburb of London—the chosen retreat of city men, and people who have come home from India. There are streets and roads, squares and crescents, with a more than common allowance of garden ground and noble old trees dispersed among them, showing how the town has overgrown the woodlands. But when I first saw it in the lengthening twilight of a pleasant evening about the middle of February, 1817, there was nothing but a hamlet of low cottages standing on the highest and most shady ground in the Uxbridge road, between two parks, the largest and most ancient in the neighbourhood of London, not twenty minutes' walk from Kensington, where the sunset light of court and fashion still lingered, and within two miles of Tyburn, where people still talked of seeing executions; yet

one of the most secluded and out-of-the-way villages one could wish for when intending to retire from the world and its vanities.

A boy who had been playing with his fellows in the gutter, showed me the way to Notting Hill House. The low-pitched, but comfortable old mansion, stands where it did, at the east end of Holland Park, on a rapidly rising ground, with lawn in front and garden in the rear, but it is called by another name now; has been repaired and remodelled by a city merchant—peace be upon him and his house, for I know him to be a worthy man. They have built a square hard by, with tall houses in it, and much curtailed the garden ground; but when I first saw the old place, it stood alone on the slope of the wooded hill where the parks of Holland and Kensington almost met; an avenue of noble trees leading up to its gates; winter flowers blooming in its lawn and garden; the red fire-light flashing from its windows, through the thick-growing evergreens, and the whole looking as if it were situated somewhere in the mid-land counties.

Our first meeting with anybody of whom we have heard or thought is an occasion to be remembered, and I had thought of Mr. Forbes in

no ordinary manner. He was the only friend my family had found in their long adversity ; the man whose generous sympathy with them and me had proved as true as it was uncommon. His wealth and mercantile status should have made his acquaintance or patronage a thing to be sought after by any man in my position : yet his invitation was more of a trial than a triumph to me. An unaccountable shrinking had always come over me at the thought of meeting him ; perhaps it was an admonitory dread of the advice against which I had been warned, but I chid myself for it determinedly as I rang at the gate. It was opened by an elderly, respectable-looking servant, with no pretensions to livery ; he showed me up the lawn, across the oak-floored hall, and into the drawing-room—a ground-floor apartment with carved wood ceiling, rather low, old-fashioned but handsome furniture, and a wide bay window.

From behind its hangings of green damask, where she seemed to have been looking out so as not to be seen, there came, slowly and awkwardly, a lady in a high dress of plain, brown silk. Her figure was small, thin, and slender, with those least attractive characteristics of woman's form, high square shoulders, and a narrow chest. Her com-

plexion was dimly fair, without a tinge of colour. Her hair was of a similar hue, thin, and tightly put up. There was nothing striking about her face, except that it was of an uncommon size and leanness, with features to match. Yet as she approached me, and collected all her composure in the fading light, I could see that I had to do with a gentlewoman. She made me a courteous inclination, saying, "Miss Forbes;" then kindly extended her hand, and added, "I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. La Touche, papa has told me so much of you. He will be here in a minute."

I pressed the offered hand; it was small and fair as that of my own Rosanna, and there was no awkwardness about the lady now; she recommended me a seat close by the bright, blazing fire, asked if I had any difficulty in finding my way to their lonely old house—it was rather an out-of-the-way place, but very pleasant in the summer time, and papa liked it; his health was delicate, and would not agree with living in town.

While I was expressing my high opinion of the situation, a tall and decidedly Scotch-looking gentleman stepped in, with a likeness to my early friend Melrose Morton in his air and manner which almost startled me; but he looked at least

thirty years older, had perfectly grey hair, and a face that told of heavy cares, personal suffering, or some great sorrow not to be shaken off or worn away by time; and she said, "Here is papa."

I could believe that Mr. Forbes was a nervous man, for he received me—his deep debtor, and in a manner his liege man—kindly, indeed, but with a look of one who had screwed up his courage to some duty, and would go through with it. His daughter seemed to be aware of his difficulties, and helped him over them, not taking upon herself, but screening, his embarrassment with gentle, womanly tact.

In the distribution of nature's gifts, little beauty had fallen to Helen Forbes' share; yet I thought then, as I did many a time after, notwithstanding my own unlucky part in her history, that a wiser and better man might have lost his heart to her, as readily as I did mine to the beautiful girl in Baltimore. I have given a true description of her appearance at first sight; but I have not described, and no words of mine could do justice to the feminine grace and dignity of her habitual manner, the sweetness of her smile—which even at its brightest had something tender and melancholy in it—and the pure, ear-

nest, loving soul that looked out of her deep brown eyes. She had seen little of what is called society—little of the world in any department. Her schooling had been at home, and her travels extended no farther than her father's removal from Dublin to London; but a sound English education, some accomplishments, and more natural taste and sense, made her an agreeable and interesting companion. Her age was twenty-six—just three years above my own—but she looked thirty. I think she was quietly cheerful by nature; but some wintry shadow had fallen upon her youth, making it sad and sober, as her father looked in the midst of his growing wealth and rising position. Whence that cloud had come I could not imagine then; but as one that must get an explanation, I set it down to the account of their Scottish Calvinism, for the Forbes were Presbyterians—neither strict nor sour, as Esthers had reported them; but both father and daughter seemed to have come to that melancholy conviction of life's being but a task and a trial which appears to me, though I have no reason to give for it, the peculiar characteristic of Scottish piety in modern times.

There was no company but myself expected, and I had the honour of conducting Miss Forbes

to the dining-room. We passed through the library to it: as usual in old mansions, all the rooms communicated, and were all furnished in the same antiquated but elegant style. The attendants I saw were all Scotch, elderly and respectable, evidently attached to the family, and long in the service. Miss Forbes presided, as she had done over her father's house and table from her sixteenth year. A better hostess could not have been found in London; with her assistance, and our own inclination, Mr. Forbes and I slid quietly into acquaintance.

Unready as both parties had been to meet, we took kindly to each other as soon as that terrible ordeal to all true Britons, the first encounter, was fairly over. He was a sensible, courteous, amiable man, with a good deal of Scotch prudence, and what is not incompatible with it, however Southern men may sneer, genuine generosity of practice and opinion.

I never heard Forbes speak ill of anybody, if he could help it. I know that his large but discriminating charity was the stay and the praise of his poorer neighbours. Servants, clerks, and friends, people of every degree who knew him best, could tell of help from his purse, or influence given to struggling men in their sore neces-

sity, and kept from the world more closely than his private accounts.

Forbes had some pride too—I never knew an honest Scotchman who had not; his walls were covered with the portraits of his ancestors, highland chiefs, ministers, and among the rest, Sir William Forbes, the famous Edinburgh banker, of whom my host was a lineal descendant. We got into acquaintance—into conversation, first on public news, then on subjects nearer home, and by the time the cloth was removed, and Miss Forbes left us, we were almost on the footing of old friends taking up the threads of their companionship after long separation. It was not the wine that did it, at least on the banker's part; while he pressed the excellent old port on my attention with sincere hospitality, and I could not help remarking it was good wine, he merely tasted it, said, "It is good, lad," and then, with the look of an anchorite casting temptation from him, filled up the half-empty glass with cold water.

I suppose he saw something like surprise in my look, and I wished he had not the next moment, for the troubled, terrified expression of the man's face at once impressed me with the conviction that there was some peculiar crack or

twist in the brain which seemed otherwise so sound, and I took a fixed resolution never to observe any eccentricity of his in future. We were friends, and we talked in a friendly manner. When he had drunk his watered glass, and got over the small upset, Mr. Forbes entered on my family affairs with equal sense and kindness. He cut short my acknowledgments of all we owed him, with—

“Lucien, my lad—I can’t call such young men as you Mr.—and since you are pleased to think I have been of any use, will you do me one favour in return?”

“Anything in my power, sir.”

“Thank you, lad. Well, just never say another word about the little I have done, or may do, to help folk better than myself, but not so well provided. Won’t you try this Burgundy?”

I declined the wine, and made the promise on which he insisted with such an earnest look; and we fell to discussing the proposed settlement of my relations. The discussion was brief and easy. I had made up my mind to accept his views upon every subject except Rosanna. If Mr. Forbes had heard anything of that matter, he said nothing. I got good advices, but they were such as my own heart

and conscience concurred in, and given in a friendly, confidential manner—not in the tone of the patron or admonisher which I had been led to expect.

We grew friendly—we grew familiar. I felt as if Mr. Forbes were no stranger to me, and the cause was plain to my after thinking. It was not alone that he knew the history of my family, and had been their steady almost their only friend; but his resemblance to my early help and adviser, Melrose Morton, went beyond that of air and general appearance, which struck me at first sight: he had the same sound judgment, the same high principles, honesty of word and deed and consideration, which took in every title of other people's difficulties. Forbes was an older and a sadder man; he had lost a wife and children; doubtless it was that long sorrow which pressed upon him still—health and heart seemed to have bowed under the burden, in spite of worldly prosperity. It was strange to me, young as I was, that time and good fortune had not closed or covered that rent in his life; but certain it was that the regret or the memory seemed to me the only difference between him and Melrose Morton.

We had settled everything—the removal of

the three women to London : they were to march under Wilson's conduct, as it would not have been expedient for me to quit Palivez' bank, or ask leave of absence so soon.

"They are all strangers to you," said Mr. Forbes ; "there is no use you opening your family affairs to them. Wilson is a discreet, respectable man ; your grand-aunt knows him long and well ; he will manage everything as well as you could do, perhaps better, for he is not such a stranger in the country. I can spare him for a fortnight, or longer, if need be ; he will bring them safe ; and as you have not time to earn much yet—as I know you will, lad—I will do myself the pleasure of bearing their expenses. I'll take no denial, no thanks, either. Lucien, remember your promise. Where do you think of taking a house ?"

"I am not quite sure, sir." My mind was getting confused on the subject of the motives, yet nothing but downright generosity could explain his conduct.

"Well,"—Forbes watered another glass for himself—"I was going to ask you to be my tenant. I have got some house-property in that new neighbourhood of Bayswater, not a step from this, just through the turnpike-gate. Some

London speculators took a turn for building there last year, nearly opposite the Palace-gardens. They were to make a town of it, and commenced with Moscow-road, in Petersburg-place, in honour of the Emperor of Russia, who made himself so popular when the allied sovereigns visited us. They partly built the place, and there it stands—a half-square of decent little houses, with small gardens in front and rear. But the road never got finished; people thought it too far out of town, too lonely, too new; the chief speculator had gone beyond his depth, and was bankrupt before the end of the season; the place was in the market, and I bought it pretty cheap. Some retired quiet people, who partly knew me, have come out to live there; they can do so as economically as in the country: the widow of one of our Scotch ministers, a doctor's family who have lost their father, a lieutenant on half-pay with his wife and children, and two or three more equally respectable neighbours, would make one vacant house which I happen to have on hand, an eligible residence for you and your family. Yes, my lad, you are getting a household about you early; but there is nothing like an apprenticeship to any business, especially when it is one's duty. There is no other way to the bless-

ing which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow, Lucien. But as I was saying, they could live nicely and quietly there; you could come out and in to them by any of the coaches from the Bank. It is a fine walk for a young man in fair weather, too. You would be near neighbours to Helen and me; we could help one another in any time of emergency—they are always coming in this uncertain life; and you could come and see us very often. We are lonely people, and not much given to company, neither myself nor Helen, young as she is—maybe I have brought her up too much out of the world, but it is an evil one, and there were family reasons,” said Forbes, with a sort of wince.

I saw the prudence and eligibility of his plan—how much forethought the wealthy banker took for me and mine—and I at once accepted the house in Petersburg-place. He wrote out an order for his agent to let me see the premises on the back of his own card, and as we adjourned to the drawing-room, said in a careless, easy way: “You need not trouble yourself about furnishing, that is all done to your hand; ‘a melian is nothing without a plenishen,’ as they say in Scotland.”

I would have thanked him, but he shook his head at me, and we entered the large, hand-

some, well-lighted room, to find Helen sitting alone by the fire knitting, with a large snow-white cat by her side. How old and retired, and settled down she looked ! but how friendly and unembarrassed we three had grown.

I felt myself a kind of a cousin to the Forbes'—they were acting a part not common among cousins ; that both father and daughter seemed pleased with my company, and cheered up by my conversation, helped to lighten the weight of so much of unmerited and unaccountable kindness. Before we parted, Forbes himself arranged that I should spend every Saturday evening with them. All banks closed earlier on that day, and the proposal reminded me once more of Melrose Morton and our Saturday afternoons at the grammar school.

CHAPTER XI.

LUCIEN'S NEW HOME.

IN pursuance of the plan agreed on that evening, I wrote to my aunt and sister earnestly requesting them to come to me in London, and bring Hannah Clark with them, promising that not one of the three should ever want, and enjoining them to put themselves and their affairs entirely under the conduct of Watt Wilson, who cheerfully undertook the commission.

"It's proud I'll be," said our ancient and still loyal clerk, "to bring along the last of the La Touches of Armagh. It minds me of the times when the master couldn't get away himself, and used to send me to bring the missis home from the salt water"—he meant the sea-side. "I'll bring them safe and sound, never fear, Mr. Lucien; I wish it was to a castle they were coming, or to your own grand establishment

that will be seen in the city some day," and Wilson looked profoundly impressed with the truth of his own prediction.

Then I presented Mr. Forbes' order to his agent, the only tradesman in the place. He kept a general shop, consisting of his parlour window at the corner, and I took a formal survey of our intended residence. The small semi-square known as Petersburg-place, has still a retired look of country quiet, though the Moscow-road which was to lead to it has been long built with many another road and place in the populous and now busy neighbourhood of Bayswater. There is no traffic, no concourse there. Eyes familiar with London localities will perceive that the houses are old-fashioned, intended for, and still occupied by persons of limited respectability, though rather dingy and closely built upon; but at the time of my formal survey, they stood like a detached hamlet, in the open fields opposite Kensington Palace gardens, sheltered on the north side by a few tall trees, a remnant of Kensington Park, which was first cut into at that quarter, and still gives its name to many a square and terrace, new built, new painted, and with more garden ground than they can boast of now. The place had but one

street lamp, an ancient oil one, for gas had not yet shown on London city. The twopenny post did not come out so far, no watchman was thought necessary to the maintenance of its peace, the inhabitants had not much to lose, but they barred their doors well at nightfall, and went with all their difficulties to Mr. Forbes' agent. The house he showed me over, number nine, was as well finished as any there, and very respectably furnished.

"They did it all themselves, sir, he and Miss Helen," said the agent, "that is, they gave the orders and looked after the doing of them, for a relation, I think, or some genteel person as changed their minds, the more fools they, I can tell them, there is not such a landlord from this to Mile-end as Mr. Forbes, no screwing up rents or shuffling out of repairs with him."

"I am quite sure of that; but what is the rent?" said I.

"Well, sir, it just astonishes myself; you are the gentleman named in the order—Mr. La Touche, I suppose?"

"The very same."

"Then, sir, it is forty pound to you; mind, you will never get the like of it."

"Never," said I, endeavouring to keep my

composure, for pride and gratitude were striving within me. Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen to look after the furnishing of a house, and let it to me and my relations at a nominal rent ! would Providence ever enable me to return the obligations I owed that man ? I took the house on a seven years' lease, as the agent said he was instructed to propose to me. I made some other arrangements requisite for commencing house-keeping in the neighbourhood of London—by-the-bye, Mr. Forbes directed my inexperience through the medium of his agent, the man of the general shop, in the parlour window ; he gave me sundry suggestions, and I guessed where they came from. The wealthy banker had more Scottish tact, more genuine delicacy, than to meddle overtly with the domestic affairs of the poor family he was assisting at all points. In due time, according to the postal arrangements of that period—what a different world it is from eight-and-forty years ago—I got a response written and spelled in Rhoda's usual style, setting forth their difficulties about coming, because Miss Livey was afraid I would send for that girl in America and get married ; but come they would, for that woman in the farm-house would not let them stay, “and, dear Lucien,” said

Rhoda in her P.S., "I hop you will not be asshamed of us before your grand freends in London."

About a fortnight after the receipt of that communication, I was at London Bridge, pacing about the pier one clear cold evening and waiting for the arrival of the Belfast packet, which was to bring Wilson and my intended household. The wind had been fair, and the packet came in not an hour after she was due. The custom-house officers had done their duty on board against the unpaying importation of Irish whisky. The passengers began to come ashore, and I saw Watt Wilson conducting an old infirm woman, thin, wrinkled, much bent by years and rheumatism; and a substantial, rosy rustic—I had almost said vulgar looking—young one, whose bringing up in a farm-house nobody could doubt. They were dressed in coarse blue gowns of linen, shapeless straw hats, shabby shawls; and there were my active, high-tempered, bustling, grand-aunt, Miss Livey, and the pretty child who used to play with me, of whose grown-up resemblance to Rosanna I had quite convinced myself—my long-remembered sister Rhoda. They were followed by a still more shabbily dressed girl, with a half-wild, half frightened look,

gazing at everything with open mouth and eyes, and making strange noises, whom Wilson held fast by the hand and vainly endeavoured to quiet, as I, feeling that no foreigners could be half so strange to me, came forward to the group, and he said—"Here we are, Mr. Lucien."

I remember being kissed and hugged on the spot by my old aunt ; being stared at, and then awkwardly shaken hands with by my sister ; having some trouble to keep the dumb girl from running away for fear of me ; helping Wilson to get a deal chest, two spinning-wheels, and a reel safely landed ; getting the entire party into the Uxbridge coach, which left us close on Petersburg-place, and duly installing them in number nine. I was probably as strange to their sight and memory as they were to mine. I think their expectations were not so far disappointed in me. Lucien had been the gentleman of the family for a considerable time, and the idea seemed to have got an overwhelming confirmation by the first sight of me. On my part, no evidence of disagreeable surprise was permitted to be visible. When the first shock of the meeting was over, I welcomed and almost rejoiced to gather these remnants of a once happy and long-ruined home once more around

me ; however unlike what I had expected to see them, they were my nearest living relations—the two that kept me from being alone in the world. Wilson ably assisted in the settlement; stayed with us to supper, helped to make us acquainted with each other, as sixteen years of separation required, drank our healths and went home to his sister in Hammersmith, rejoicing that the La Touches had got a house of their own again.

Days passed, and things worked themselves into their new channels ; so did myself and family. The deal chest was unpacked ; the spinning-wheels established. The bewilderment of their long voyage, the strange place, the strange Lucien, began to wear off my aunt and sister : the one ceased to sit and look at me as if she had never seen the like before ; the other gave up speaking in a frightened whisper ; even the dumb girl got reconciled to my presence, and did not jump away when I opened the door. In short, we settled into something like domestic order. All women know how to assume the government within four walls. My aunt took the general oversight, my sister the practical housekeeping, and Hannah Clark devoted herself to the duties of the maid-of-all-work. It

was the train of life they had followed in the end of the Antrim farm-house. I don't believe that any power or change of circumstances could have kept them out of it, and, situated as we were, it seemed the most practicable. I went out to Palivez' bank every morning, and came home to them at night, having arranged to that effect with Esthers.

He had first thought it was not according to the rules of the house for me to sleep out of it ; the Palivez always liked to keep their people close about the business ; but when I talked of applying to madame, he said there was no necessity, and took the opportunity to suppose, that with such a houseful of women on my hands, I would never think of marrying now.

Well, I had got a house and home, and could earn sufficient to keep it honestly, had there been no generous banker living within half a mile. I had a sister to manage the establishment, an aunt to keep things proper, a maid whom they could regulate, and the consciousness of doing my duty. The uncared-for, uncompanionable days of boarding-house and bank life were over ; there was a family to bid my outgoing good-bye, and welcome my return—to meet at the breakfast-table, and sit with at

the evening fire. This was what my domestic nature had pined for through many a solitary year; yet with what drawbacks are our wishes granted and our choices given! Before the first week had fairly elapsed, I was made sensible, in spite of my best endeavours to think the contrary, that the days of boarding-house and bank were blest with comfort and quiet never to be attained in number nine. It was not alone in aspect or attire, accent or manner, that my new-found relations differed from me and those with whom I associated.

The years which I had spent in city life, with all its appliances and civilizations, they had passed in the end of a farm-house on the Antrim shore; and let me observe that remote farm-houses in the north of Ireland were then a long way behind similar establishments on the London road. Boiling potatoes, making butter, and spinning flax were the three branches of domestic economy with which they were thoroughly acquainted, but beyond these neither their experience nor their knowledge extended. It was not within the scope of my acquirements to alter or enlarge their housekeeping views; but when carpets looked as if chickens had been fed on them—when plates and dishes showed marks

of dirty fingers—when chops and steaks were burned to so many cinders—I could not help being aware of the fact, and wishing for some improvement.

It was a vexation to see the pretty furniture which Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen had looked after, according to the agent's account, soiled, scratched, and every way misused by hands unaccustomed to anything capable of injury ; while the glass, china, and all sorts of brittle ware suffered to a frightful extent, from their being habituated to nothing but tin and pewter. Very few meals passed off without a smash ; but these were not the only disagreeable noises in our establishments. Like most of what are called deaf mutes, poor Hannah Clark possessed the power of speech, but not that of hearing, and made it manifest by unintelligible sounds, or rather shouts, which, strange to say, conveyed her meaning to my aunt and sister, and were responded to by answering shouts and signs, putting me in considerable fear of indictment for nuisance, as their conversation, generally carried on with open doors, was sufficient to disturb a much less quiet neighbourhood.


Poor Hannah was taller and more slender than my sister, but robust and active. She was

tolerably handsome, too, though her face had something of Sally Joyce's edge—keen of eye and apprehension, but utterly uneducated as regarded mental training. How difficult it is to guess at the powers of thought that are locked from us in perpetual silence, yet speech and hearing are but the instruments of the mind ! Hannah had one of her own without them, as after-time made plain to me ; for the present she showed but a quick eye for sign and look, a ready hand for all manner of work that was known to her, including fine spinning, and a temper which, though generally good and easy, might be dangerous if overmuch crossed or excited.

My grand-aunt, the once notable Miss Livey, came next to her in right of peculiarity. She was far altered from the woman I remembered so upright, active, and wiry ; but her ancient affection for old caps and gowns had been confirmed by time and circumstances ; her long occupation of the corner of a farm-house, not particularly kept, made the neatly-furnished London rooms irreconcilably uncomfortable to her age ; her long-drawn battle with the cousin's housekeeper, and perhaps the pressure of years and poverty, had turned the high temper, whose

breaking forth was the terror of my childhood, to a sour and continuous grumble, as spirited wine is apt to turn to vinegar; a habit of observing the faults, flaws, and wrong sides of everything, which Esthers himself could not have rivalled, and of descanting on them without cessation to the nearest listener, or, if need were, to herself alone.

Poor old woman! she had not become a pleasant home-companion; but the consolatory doctrine of the back being fitted to the burden never found a more forcible illustration than in my sister Rhoda. Her figure was short and solid, her face round, rosy, and good-humoured, with pretty blue eyes and glossy brown hair; it was kept strictly tidy, so were her linen gown and check apron (I got her to change them for print and muslin); Rhoda liked to be dressed as well as other girls—liked to be admired, I suppose, but nature had blessed her with a disposition so easy, so acquiescing in everything that came in her way, that effort or endeavour after improvement were out of the question. It was not resignation to the inevitable, which most of us learn in process of time, but downright contentment and satisfaction with the case as it stood, however that might be.



Rhoda had been content spinning in the end of the solitary farm-house; she was content when the exceeding strangeness wore off, listening to her aunt grumbling in number nine; and had it been Rhoda's lot to sweep chimnies she would have been perfectly contented with the soot. Whoever took the government of her, got it; whatever statutes were promulgated, she obeyed, always finding a corner of her own to retire from them, and a subject of cheerfulness or consolation under every difficulty. That character had enabled her to live, ay, and thrive, through the misfortune, the successive deaths, the poverty and cheerless years which she had seen. It enabled her to endure Miss Livey, to find companionship in Hannah Clark, and to take no annoyance from what she called my genteel ways; but it also prevented her from ever advancing in manner or appearance. A new bonnet or gown were always welcome to her; she sat upright at table when told of it, and handled her fork properly when reminded of the same; she took private lessons from me in writing and spelling, would sit at it diligently while under my eye and command; but I never knew her to improve in word or letter. Rhoda was my affectionate sister till the end of the chapter—that is to say,

about six months' teaching, when I gave it up in despair. Yet, as we came to know each other better, the girl was not without sense and judgment of a sound practical kind; there was nobody one could have consulted on heart or home subject with a better chance of getting good counsel: if she did not understand the matter, Rhoda would say so plainly.

I think liberation from pride was one of the great causes of her contentment, and, as concerned character of man or woman, she had an insight which certainly came from nature, not from opportunity. Moreover, though she never spelled the word correctly to my knowledge, Rhoda was affectionate to her grumbling old aunt, whose converse with her varied between high and low scolding—to poor Hannah, who had been her only companion all the farm-house time, and chiefly to myself; her memory had remained faithful to her childhood's love, through long years of change and separation; it was still true to her far estranged brother, in spite of his genteel ways, and the sometimes too evident probability of "his being ashamed of her." She was proud of Lucien, thought he had a right to be a gentleman, whatever troubles the fact occasioned her, regarded his interests more wisely

than he did himself at times, and he has lived to know the value of that sister.


In the meantime, I tried hard to get my new household into my ways, or bring my mind to put up with theirs for peace and duty's sake. It was not an easy effort, though Watt Wilson came to my assistance. They knew him best; he was the one friend with whom they could talk in their own fashion, without being on the height of good behaviour, which is not a pleasant position for anybody. He heard Miss Livey's complaints and Rhoda's perplexities with the new state of things; he advised them on the conduct of domestic matters; the bachelor-clerk had a surprising knowledge of the like, he made no difficulty in setting them right on the spot; and with my grateful concurrence, he brought his sister from Hammersmith to help in their reclamation.

She was a sensible, honest creature, like himself, but burdened with a large family and a small income, which her brother's boarding in the house somewhat increased. I knew she would be a congenial acquaintance, and they had need of such, besides the grand object of her introduction, which Mrs. Mason seemed perfectly to understand, and did her

best to accomplish. It is but fair to acknowledge that some amelioration was effected in course of time, but number nine never could be boasted of as a neat and orderly establishment, and I found myself as solitary within its walls as ever I had been in boarding-house or bank. Companionship with my grand-aunt was out of the question, at her best days, Miss Livey had been intelligent only on Irish house-keeping, and now, her retirement to bed, which occurred early and often, was a positive relief to the whole premises.

Rhoda's education and mine were too far apart to make association pleasant on either side. The good girl learned to sweep and dust the sitting-room before I came home, light two candles, and leave me to my books and meditations, whilst she retired to the litter and liberty of the kitchen, from whence her noisy conversation with Hannah—I never was sure which made the most noise—resounded through the house, till I rang the bell, and my aunt shouted down to them from her bed-room on the first-floor.

There was no help for it. But little of my time was passed at home, and the less seemed the better; besides, one gets used to anything,



and I had a standing invitation to the Forbes' every Saturday evening, which grew into a regular and customary thing with them and me. It was the only form of society I had, and besides myself there was very little company at Notting Hill House. They visited number nine in due form, after waiting with Scottish tact, and, let me add, consideration, till we were fairly settled. Miss Helen came often after, but they were evidently visits of duty and of charity. She listened to Miss Livey—it was my good fortune to be generally out at the time—she talked to Rhoda as much as possible, and tried to give religious instruction to Hannah Clark; but the poor girl never could be got to remain quiet long enough, much less to comprehend one of the serious truths Miss Forbes endeavoured to impress upon her.

Helen deplored the fact, so did her father, and often exhorted me to labour for Hannah's enlightenment, as opportunity served. The work was not to my mind, perhaps not within my capacity. I put them off with promises of attempting it some day, then I reasoned myself out of its possibility; Hannah remained untaught, but nevertheless did her work in the

world, as most of us do, with or without instruction.

I had a harder task about this time in disclosing the new aspect of my affairs to Rosanna, according to the policy which I had instinctively adopted from the dawn of our acquaintance—by-the-bye, it was the unconscious counterpart of my uncle's towards myself—she got precise information when everything was settled. No help of thought or counsel could be expected from that quarter: I was getting more and more clear-sighted on the subject, and it was easier to tell all when the business was done, and arguments and persuasions were useless.

How would she bear to hear of such a hindrance to our union? I had said everything a man could say, in a long letter of my unalterable constancy and attachment to her alone. I had set the duty I owed to my family before her in the clearest light, and I had given hopes which my own mind scarcely entertained of better days in prospect. Yet I waited with considerable anxiety for the arrival of the next packet. At length it came, and I was relieved beyond

telling by the first reading of Rosanna's letter. There was a deal of ill-spelled grief in it—fears that my relations wouldn't like her, and renewed jealousy of the London ladies; but Rosanna's heart was not broken by the intelligence; she wound up with an account of a new bonnet, and how well she looked in it, and an old gentleman who had taken to gazing at her from over the way, but she always hid behind the window-curtain, and wouldn't mind him; and concluded with the announcement that Sally was giving Jeremy no peace to come home again, for America didn't answer her health at all.

I read that passage over a second time, and not with the joy of heart which might have been expected. To see my Rosanna again, and read my welcome in her laughing eyes, I would have taken a long journey in any weather; but the prospect of her elder sister coming to my side of the Atlantic had more of fear for me than I would have cared to confess. But the voyage was long, and they were only thinking of it; Sally thought about many impracticable things, and this might be one of them.

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I sent back a soothing letter, full of reiterated vows and good advice, both honestly meant; and I fretted in secret because there was no prospect, no probability of taking my poor girl to myself away from her termagant sister—whom I knew she was so willing to leave—and from the unsafe, uncomfortable life she led in that far-off street in Baltimore.

CHAPTER XII.


A SUDDEN APPEARANCE AND A TALK WITH HELEN
FORBES.

MELROSE MORTON and I had corresponded regularly since my arrival in London—it had been his last stipulation when he left me on board the ‘Franklin’—and the same packet by which I heard from Rosanna brought me a letter from him, warmly commending the course I had taken, and assuring me that the sacrifice would be remembered and rewarded, if not in this world, certainly in that better one to come.

“You have begun well, Lucien,” he said, “in taking upon yourself the duty most evidently set before you, and I hope, above all things, that you will persevere in it. Remember it is far better never to undertake a thing than to tire of it or stop midway—

this can only bring evil to ourselves and to others, the curse pronounced against him that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is ratified by reason and experience as well as revelation. But I know you counted the cost before you began to build the tower; and I also know that He who called you to this duty can find means to reconcile 'it with your wishes, should they seem good in His sight."

My trust in Morton's judgment had grown stronger as my own strengthened with man's estate and experience. I had written everything to him—my family difficulties, Mr. Forbes' unexampled kindness, my intimacy at his house, and opinions of him and his daughter—how good, and yet how sober and sorrow-stricken they seemed. He had passed my account of them with very little remark—they were evidently strangers, in whom he took no interest; my private affairs occupied him too much to think of mere acquaintances; and I was thinking of the half-prophecy of good days to come, contained in his last letter, by way of consolation under the above-mentioned fret and the household annoyances enlarged on in the last chapter, which happened



to be more than commonly demonstrative that Saturday evening. I had made my escape from them to Notting Hill House, the only city of refuge then known to me.

The spring was coming fast—violets and the early primroses were blooming in the lawn and at the roots of the old trees in the avenue; the lengthening day made my accustomed hour some time before sunset—perhaps I had come early too—and when the servant had shown me into the drawing-room Miss Forbes had not come down from dressing, and her father had not come home from business; but I was no stranger now, and I took my seat at the bay window to enjoy the fine prospect of park and pasture-land which the early spring was making so freshly green.

It was a soft, clear evening for that season: the western sky was red with the setting sun, and a light wind stirred the tops of the tall trees. One could have imagined himself in the heart of the country—a hundred miles from London—the place looked so sylvan and retired. From the height on which Mr. Forbes' house stood, I could see far into the old Kensington Park, which then covered the opposite slope;

they had begun to cut into it here and there, and there was one wide path straight before my window, wild and grassy, growing narrower as it went up among the thick trees, and cheered by a small bright stream, that played and sparkled down the wooded hill-side. It looked like a forest glade. I half expected to see the fallow deer come out of the shade and drink at that wild stream.

The place is a broad road now, leading up to the parish church of St. John's, with small houses on either side, a few tall trees in the centre, and the stream gone out of sight and into the service of the Water Company; but as I sat and looked on it by the light of the setting day, a lady, mounted on a beautiful bay horse, wearing a dark green riding-habit, with black hat and feather, came up from the Uxbridge-road, in a style of rapid but graceful riding which might have served Diana when hunting without her train. I had never seen her but once, and in a different trim; but the air and figure were not to be mistaken, and I recognised Madame Palivez. No groom rode behind her; she turned up the wild grassy path at a gallop, as if bound for the depths of the park; but half way up the slope she drew bridle, alighted

with an ease and activity I had not thought practicable in a lady's riding gear, and stood with her hand on the horse's neck, while the beautiful creature, evidently from the land of the gazelle, stooped and drank at the stream.

The forest scene never appeared to me so complete as now. The Arab horse curvetted, bowed its graceful neck under its mistress's hand ; I saw her pull off her glove to stroke it as she stood there and looked about her, up through the tall trees, down the grassy path, and at last at the house and window where I was sitting. Did she see and know me at that distance? I fancied she did. Would it be stepping out of my poor clerk's place to bow or give any sign of recognition? But next moment her eyes were turned away. Madame Palivez had not seen, had not thought of me at all, but was suddenly charmed by the prospect and the evening.

Her hand was on the mane, and with one bound she was in the saddle again, cantering away through the park, and the last flutter of her dark habit fading among the trees, as I heard the sound of approaching steps ; and I know not what made me turn hastily from the window, and get absorbed in a book, which

happened to lie on a side table quite convenient. It was a collection of Heber's Hymns, and on the first blank page, at which it chanced to open, there was written, "To Miss Helen Forbes, from her affectionate friend and cousin, Melrose Morton." My astonishment was so great that I held the book in my hand, and was palpably reading the presentation, when Miss Forbes came up with her extended hand, sweet, melancholy smile, and kindly greeting. She must have seen the surprise in my face, and I was too curious to postpone the inquiry.

"I have taken the liberty to look at your book, Miss Forbes."

"Oh, you are quite welcome."

"Beautiful Hymns those of Heber. But I see they have been given you by a Baltimore friend of mine, Melrose Morton."

"Did you really know him in America? How singular!" she said.

"Yes, I knew him well. Our acquaintance is of more than sixteen years' standing. I should have told you all about it, had I known he was a relation of yours."

"Oh, yes, he is my cousin, and was always kind to me. We used to be quite friendly when he was in papa's bank in Dublin; but"—there

was something at once sad and embarrassed in her look—"he and his mother would go to America, and they seem to have forgotten us since. I think there was some dispute between Melrose and papa ; but you will not speak of it, Mr. La Touche—it would vex him so, because Melrose left us just at the time poor mamma and my two brothers died."

Could that be the reason Morton had never spoken of the Forbes' as his cousins? Neither he nor the banker looked like implacable men : what could the nature of their dispute be? But it was proper for me to inquire further, and I could think of no change of subject but Madame Palivez.

"Oh, yes; she passes our house often in the summer-time; I think this is her first appearance; she is coming out to her country house early," said Helen, in reply to my account of the fair equestrian.

"Does she live in the neighbourhood?" I was determined to get information.

"Yes; she has built a little villa, a gem of a house, quite foreign-like, at the west-end of the park—the most wonderful wild place you ever saw. She keeps a couple of old servants—I think they are both Greeks—there all the sum-

mer ; rides down when she likes, quite alone, though there are grooms and footmen enough about her house in town, I hear ; and shuts it up all the winter. Papa says the house is so simply furnished that bad people would find nothing to steal."

"That path seems a round about way to her villa."

"So it is, but she had it made for herself ; it winds away beautifully through the old trees. I go to walk there sometimes in fine weather. There is no straighter one for her, except going down the road, and along the end of Norland Park. It is all parks and plantations here, you see ; and that way would be just as long."

"I suppose Madame don't care for long ways—she has such a fine horse, and rides so well."

"Ay, she does ride beautifully ; I never saw one look so free and easy in the saddle." How sincere she looked in the other lady's praise !

"And her horse is such a noble creature—knows her so well, and is so fond of her. Many a time, when I sit here at work in the summer afternoons, I see her coming home from her long rides. They say she goes away miles into the country, pausing to let it drink at the stream,

and stroking its neck just as you saw her ; and the horse will turn from the water, rub its head against her, and stands so quiet till she bounds into the saddle. Is she not active and handsome ? and papa says Madame is not young at all, but I can't believe it."

"She has been managing the bank so long," said I.

"For sixteen years, they say, since her father died, and nearly four when he was old and retired from business. Before that she was abroad, most of her time travelling in Russia and the East : I suppose it was there she learned to ride so well. Mr. Esthers says her relations are all in those quarters, and she leaves England every second year on long journeys in the same direction to see them, and the houses and agents the Palivez have in all the Eastern towns. Must not Madame be wonderfully clever and capable to manage it all, that great business, as papa says she does, though Mr. Esthers don't allow it ? Yet I think there must be a good deal left to him when she is on her travels every second year, and so much in the fashionable world every season."

"In the fashionable world ! I thought she lived very retired ?"

"I believe she does, in Old Broad-street, quite in the Eastern style. Papa says they lived the same way in Dublin. But Madame has a fine furnished house in Curzon-street, Mayfair, where she receives company, and goes to balls and parties all the season. I am told all the great people of the west-end are her acquaintances; and she is very intimate at the Russian Embassy. Perhaps it is, as Solomon tells us, 'that the rich have many friends.' She keeps a box at the opera, too, and one in each of the best theatres; in short, she sees a deal of gaiety in the season, but always leaves town early; then her house in Curzon-street is shut up. She lives mostly at her villa in the Park. Nobody is ever asked there, and her fashionable friends know nothing about it. Now I know what you are thinking of," continued Helen, with a smile of quiet archness—"woman's curiosity; and how could I find out so much about a stranger?"

"No, indeed, Miss Forbes; I was thinking no such thing. It is natural you should know a good deal. Your father has been long acquainted with the Palivez, and Madame is a very"—I paused to find the proper word.

"Very interesting, very remarkable person," said Helen, helping me out. "Of course I don't

know her. We never met ; never were introduced. But seeing her and her horse pass here so often when I sit at work, having little to occupy my attention, perhaps, and hearing so much of her from papa and Mr. Esthers when he happens to call, I must confess to a good deal of interest in Madame and her ways."

"Mr. Esthers could tell you most about them, I suppose? He ought to have the fullest information, being so long in the bank, and in such a confidential position, though I never found him willing to give any ; he rather avoids speaking of Madame to me."

"That is strange ! For he is always talking of Madame, when he comes here !"

"Is Esthers any relation to her?"

"Papa thinks he is ; but how near or distant nobody knows. He came into the bank very young, in her uncle's lifetime, when her father was only the younger brother there, and she was abroad on her travels."

"Miss Forbes, do you know if it be true that the Palivez always send their daughters to some part of Southern Russia, where they come from, and go there to get married?"

"I believe it is true. And there is another strange thing which you must have heard about

them. None of them ever lived to be old ; they all die somewhere about middle age. I have heard Mr. Esthers say so ; everybody says it, and he sometimes hints that Madame's life cannot be long now. Papa says her death would be no grief to him. He certainly did not look grieved when he said it ; and we think, from some other hints he dropped, that Mr. Esthers must be next heir, for Madame allows herself to be the last of the Palivez."


"Esthers will be very rich then, and thought a great catch, I'll warrant."

"No doubt he will," said Helen ; "but"—

"But what, Miss Forbes?"

We were on terms familiar enough for small jesting ; but I was surprised to see the swift, bright blush which mantled over her usually pallid face, as she said—

"Perhaps it is not right to think or say, but I never liked Mr. Esthers, though he has been friendly to papa in many ways, and rather seeks our acquaintance. I don't know why ; but there is something keen and watchful in his look, as if he were taking notes of everything, and he has such a habit of seeing people's faults and mischances in the very worst light. I think he would make anybody discontented, if they



listened to him long enough. I never knew him to come here without telling me what a lonely place it was. Do you think it so very lonely?"

"It is rather retired. But, as you told me when I first came here, it must be very pleasant in the summer time."

"Oh! very," said Helen, "when all the trees are full of leaves; when the wood-lark sings among them all day, and the nightingale all night, one forgets the dreariness of winter then. I'll allow the winter is dreary, so far from London; but papa likes a quiet place, and I like whatever pleases him."

"That is very good of you!"

"No, it is only my duty; besides, retirement is, perhaps the best thing for us."

The bright blush had faded away, and the face regained its pale soberness by this time.

"One is more apt to think seriously when out of the noise and bustle of the busy world. Yet, when I was younger, I used to wish sometimes that papa had not taken the loss of my poor mamma and brother quite so much to heart, or chose to lead such a solitary and very quiet life. He never cared for company or going out anywhere since then, though before it he was cheerful and social.

"I can remember him myself, though I was but a child, and everybody says he is such an altered man.

"Many a time I have tried to cheer him up, but could never well succeed, that sorrow weighs so heavy on him ; yet my father does not repine at the dispensations of Providence. I know his Christian faith and knowledge are above that ; but it may be I cannot understand the greatness of his loss, being so young at the time.

"At any rate, my duty is clear—to be as much of a comfort to him as I can ; and there never was a kinder, more considerate, or indulgent father. "Here he comes," she continued, with evident pleasure, catching sight of an approaching figure, which I would not have known to be Mr. Forbes at that distance—"and you will be good enough not to speak to him about Melrose Morton, it always vexes him. You won't talk of me feeling the place lonely either, Mr. La Touche ; in fact I don't now, one gets used to the like, and that would vex him, too. You won't talk about it?"

"Not a word," said I, as Mr. Forbes knocked at the door.

He seemed pleased to find me sitting there

with Helen, and looked in better spirits than usual.

The quiet evening passed in more than common cheerfulness. Helen sang and played two or three Scotch songs for us. Her voice was sweet and flexible, though of little power or compass. Her playing seemed fine to me, and I did gentleman's duty by standing behind her chair and turning the leaves of the music-book. We were all pleased with each other's company, and at the accustomed hour I took my way home, thinking, and not unpleasantly, of Helen Forbes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANCESTRAL SIGNET RING.

It was not late. The Forbes were early people, particularly on Saturday night. The Scotch Church they attended was a long way off, and required early rising on Sunday. The night was soft and clear, as the evening had been, and the moon, a little past the full, was shining gloriously on park and pasture-land.

I turned my gaze instinctively up that woodland path by which Madame Palivez had galloped home to her villa. We had talked no more of her in the course of the evening.

Helen's Scotch songs were still humming through my brain; but the flutter of the green habit disappearing through the trees was there too. I wondered how her villa

looked ; how she passed her time in it ; what a strange life she led between the business and Eastern state of Old Broad-street, the fashion and gaiety of Mayfair in the season, and the summer solitude of her hermitage at the end of Kensington Park, where nobody was ever invited, and a couple of old Greek servants kept.

What strange traditions hung about her family—known to men of business, and believed in banks and counting-houses—their daughters exported, their wives found in the far north, where offshoots of Greece were planted in the lands of the Tartar ; their princely descent—I could believe in that from her looks—their deaths at middle age—and she was the last of the Palivez ; but Madame could not be of middle age yet. They said she had managed the bank for twenty years, and been long abroad before it ; there must be some mistake—she did not look so old.

I looked up the path again ; the thick green grass and the glancing stream were clearly seen by the moonlight ; the whole scene was wild and silent as the untrodden wilderness, yet no spot ever looked so lovely

to me ; in the deep stillness I could catch the murmur of the stream—I could see it like a thread of silver winding down the grassy path ; and to this hour I know not what impulse sent me up the slope to pause beside it at the very spot where I had seen the horse drink and the lady in the green habit stroking its neck. She always let it drink there ; Helen saw her from the window where she sat at work in summer afternoons. Had Madame seen me at that same window ? I saw her look in that direction. It seemed out of range now ; but moonlight was not like day, and the position was a commanding one.

Yet, what was it to me if the lady of the bank—the last of the Palivez, and my employer—could see the window of Notting Hill House, and one of her clerks an humble friend of the family ? I ought to be at home ; but there were not many inducements there, and the night was lovely. What is there in the silvery silence of moonlight to charm away from us the worst of our cares, and bring back the best of our memories ? I had walked with Rosanna in such nights in Baltimore—was she thinking of me now ?—but

no moon could be shining there, it was daylight still, and the longitude did not make all the difference. Rosanna was not the woman to have moonlight dreams, and I knew it; but the girl was beautiful, and she loved me.

Did Madame Palivez look out upon that moon from her woodland villa? was it far off? Nonsense: I ought to be at home; another look at the stream—and what was that glancing among the wild primroses that crept down to its waters? A ring—a broad hoop of beaten gold, with an amethyst set in it, larger than common ring-stones, and engraved with the head of Jupiter. At that very spot she had pulled off her glove and stroked the horse; the ring belonged to Madame Palivez—I had no doubt of that; there were Greek characters inside which I could not read; but the ring was hers, and should be properly returned.

I went home with it in my waistcoat pocket. I showed it to Rhoda—heard her admiration of it. How large and beautiful the purple stone was with that man's face on it! How broad the hoop was, with those queer scores inside! and how small

the lady's fingers must be—it would go on none of hers farther than the tip! I wrapped the ring up in paper, slept with it under my pillow, looked at it the first thing in the morning, and took it with me to the bank, determined that Esthers should hear nothing about it till I had the honour of delivering her lost jewel into Madame's own hands.

“Lucien,” said Rhoda, as she set my breakfast, “I dreamt about that great lady all night—that she was coming to our door in her carriage and taking you with her; but, somehow, it didn't seem to be for any good; however, dreams go by contraries, and I'll warrant she'll do something for you on account of finding her ring.”

I did not expect to be done something for; the service was a small one, and only an honest clerk's duty; yet I went with some exultation of heart, and in better than everyday trim, to the private entrance which I had been happy to get out of not three months before. The porter was there, as silent and stately as ever. I handed him my card, and made my request to see Madame Palivez. He rang the bell; the Eastern-looking servant appeared, and

informed me, in his measured words and foreign accent, that Madame was not at home ; but he was the groom of her chamber, and would take charge of any message. There was no alternative but to place the ring in his hands, stating where I had found it, my belief that it belonged to Madame Palivez, and my wish that she would have the goodness to let me know whether or not I was correct in my opinion.

“The signor is perfectly correct,” said her groom, contemplating the ring with reverence enough for a relic ; “this is my lady’s ring, the signet of the Palivezi, made by a Byzantine artist and astrologer for Prince Eusibius before the family went northward and settled in Russia ; it is one of the choicest jewels of her house. Madame will give the signor great thanks for restoring it.”

I expressed my happiness at being able to serve Madame Palivez, mentioned particularly where I had found it, got more Eastern bows than I had ever been treated to before, and went to my work with a considerable feeling of disappointment.

The day passed, so did many more, and I heard nothing of the ring or its fair owner.

Madame Palivez was apparently satisfied with getting back one of the choicest jewels of her house, and thought any notice of the poor clerk who had found and restored it superfluous. It was true I had only done my duty, yet she might have acknowledged it by a civil message; never mind, I could live without her thanks; perhaps these were the manners of great ladies in the East. Such had been my reflections evening after evening as I went home; the non-notice vexed me more than I confessed to myself, much less to Rhoda, who came, poor girl, with expectation in her eyes, to meet me on my first homecoming after the ring had been delivered. I told her all that had occurred between me and Madame's servant; my heart drew to that only sister in its difficulties, despite our long separation and far different schooling. "Great people have ways of their own," said she; "I'll warrant Madame will mind it some time; and if she don't, you acted the gentleman, as you always do, I am sure."

It might have been about a fortnight after, I was walking home along the Bayswater-road—how quiet and rural it was then!—wondering why the last packet had not brought me a letter from Rosanna: I had made a resolution to think

no more of the ring, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs behind, and the sound of my own name, made me turn, and there was Madame Palivez, in her green habit, mounted on the beautiful Arabian. "Stop, Zara," she said, lightly tapping the sagacious creature with her gloved hand, for Madame carried no whip. The horse stood still as marble, and she continued to me, as I bowed, and positively felt myself blushing—"Good morning, Mr. La Touche. I have been puzzled for some days how best to thank you for finding my signet-ring."

"No thanks are requisite or expected, I assure you, Madame."

"Ay, but there should be; where did you find it?"—how anxious she looked on that point. "Among the wild primroses beside the stream," she said, as if repeating part of my account to herself, by way of making sure that she heard correctly. "How did you know the ring to be mine? I never wore it in your seeing."

"I supposed it to be yours, Madame"—my spirit was getting up under the cross-examination—"because I saw you dismount at that spot, and take off your glove, while your horse drank at the stream, from one of the windows of

Notting Hill House, where I happened to be spending the evening."

"You visit the Forbes' then? very good people, but rather dull, are they not?"

"Excellent people, Madame." She was going to say something else about them, but paused suddenly, and added—

"You made a correct guess regarding the ring ; it must have fallen from my finger then, though it seems to fit well. There are none of all my family possessions I value more."

"It is a beautiful ring, Madame, and an ancient one, I presume ; your servant told me it had been made by a Byzantine artist, before your family settled in Russia."

"Ay, yes, Calixi knows its history ; it has been our signet for nine generations—a beautiful seal ;" she had taken off her glove by this time, after first glancing along the road, as if to see that we were alone, and now the golden circlet and the engraved amethyst shone in the evening light, and on a hand whose symmetrical beauty and marble whiteness had no grace to borrow from gold or gems. It might have served for Homer's Venus, when she drew sword with such ill fortune against Minerva.

"Beautiful!" said I, meaning both the hand and the amethyst.

"The head of Jupiter, the god of the old world, the dispenser of greatness and good fortune still to those that read the stars," she said, looking at the ring, and not at me.

"Your servant mentioned that the artist who made it was also an astrologer."

"He was one of the most able professors of that immortal science in his day, and there was then some learning in the world. He made this ring according to hour and sign—the influence of the planet and the gem are united in it for the Palivezi; they have kept the signet and prospered in spite of their evil stars, which rule, nevertheless;" how seriously earnest and believing she looked!

"You have faith in astrology, then, Madame?" said I.

"Yes, I cannot disbelieve what I know to be true; but I forgot, for the moment, that you knew nothing of the science and had been taught to call it superstition."

"That is the general opinion in our day," said I; "but for my own part, I could never venture to say where truth ends and superstition begins."

"You speak wisely: their frontiers are more difficult to trace out than those of Sweden and Norway, which have lately given the commissioners so much trouble; and there are neither landmarks nor witness-stones set up for us: have you read the motto inside the ring?"

"I have not the good fortune to be a Greek scholar, Madame."

"Well, you can be a very good clerk without Greek, and, what is better, a wise man, if that be in you; language is but the channel of thought, and, as far as I know, anyone will serve the purpose as well as another; but Greek was the language of my ancestors, they spoke it at Marathon and Salamis—for we are of Athenian, and not Spartan race: the motto means, in English, 'Suffer and reign.'"

"It is a singular motto."

"It is a true one, my friend; there is no ruling without suffering to; but I have talked enough about my signet," and she drew on her glove. "You saved it from the hands of some strolling gipsy or prowling boy, and thus served the fortunes of the Palivezi. Is there any way in which I can reward you?"

"I wish for no reward, Madame;" she had encouraged me to converse as an equal, and now

the great lady was recollecting that I was but her clerk

“ But I wish to acknowledge the service : think again, is there nothing in my power that would suit you ? ”

It was doubtless pride and folly that made me answer, “ Nothing, Madame,” and doubtless the motive powers were visible, for she responded, “ Something may occur to you in a future day ; in the meantime, accept a thousand thanks ; good evening ! ” and tapping her intelligent horse to proceed, Madame Palivez galloped away. I remember watching her till she was out of sight, but the great lady never looked back. I remember going home with a confused crowd of thoughts in my mind ; a determination to tell Rhoda nothing of the interview, because there was nothing said that she could understand, except my refusal to be rewarded, which would not have met with family approbation. Yet I could have done nothing else were the whole scene to be gone through again ; and for weeks after, all that had been said to me regarding the ring, the astrologer, and the fortunes of the Palivez, was coming back word for word, with the looks, tones, and the presence of the speaker ; but I went home, I went to work, and saw nothing of Madame.

CHAPTER XIV.

INSIDE A THREE PAIR BACK.

WHAT had become of Rosanna? and why had I no letter from her? These were the questions that troubled me as weeks wore away, and packet after packet came in. I had written three times, but got no answer. Could my good advice have been ill taken? It was kindly given, and I had been accustomed to advise her. Had any mischance happened? Sally would have been sure to write; she was more than commonly ready to communicate bad news. I grew anxious; I grew half jealous, though it was not my nature. Had the old gentleman who gazed from over the way any hand in it? I would wait one week longer, and then write under cover to Jeremy, and demand an explanation.

About the middle of the said week I was

hurrying into the bank with a strong impression of being rather late, when a dirty boy ran up to me, and said, "Please, sir, where am I to find Mr. La Touche?"

There was a large note in his hand, on which I caught sight of my own name in a handwriting which, if not the most beautiful, was then the most welcome in the world to me, for it was Rosanna's.

"I am Mr. La Touche," said I, plucking the note from his fingers, and leaving him astonished over a sixpence.

There was greater astonishment for me in the communication, which I read before I reached the office.

"Dearest and most beloved Lucien,
"This is to let you know that we have all arrived safe, and got lodgings as directed above. Sally would not stay any longer in Ameriky, and made Jeremy and me come home with her. We were mercifully preserved, but very long on say; and I am in the greatest of grief and trouble about you, not known what you will say, and also having got no letters from you. Dear Lucien, do not forsake your own Rosanna; but come and see me, or I will break my heart."

There was one woman that loved and valued me—that would not regard me only as a poor clerk to be paid for services and left unnoticed as the desk at which he sat. What if her letter were ill-spelled and worse indited? The bad spelling did not look so bad in the light by which I read it then. Yet their coming to London surprised me. It was doubtless Sally's doings. In spite of the fits which kept her so much within doors, there was a restless craving for change and excitement in her uncertain brain—a frequent concomitant of such uncertainty. But the quarter in which they had established themselves seemed still more unaccountable: it was No. 5, Bolton-row, Mayfair; and Rosanna had finished what she called the direction above with, "Please to ask for the three-pair back."

What brought them? What were they going to do in London, and what was I to do? Nothing but the duty before me. There was a household, in number nine, to be maintained. The idea of bringing home a young wife to Miss Livey was not to be contemplated, independant of the question of adequate means. Our engagement could not be fulfilled, but Rosanna and I could see each other; our mutual love and sympathy would give us both support under our

different trials, and, as Morton had said, how was our attachment to stand the wear and tear of life, if it could not outlast the years of probation? I thought of those matters and of her all day. I left as soon as business would permit, and made my way through a pouring wet evening to No. 5, Bolton-row. It was a back outskirt of what was at that time the headquarters of fashion; the spot which the Prince Regent delighted to honour with his presence at ball and party; the quarter into which all the leaders, dependencies, and offscouring of the fashionable world crowded in the season; where small houses were let at enormous rents, and back rooms yielded a revenue to those that let them.

Bolton-row was sacred to that class: its high narrow houses were filled to overflowing with the hangers-on of the *beau monde*; and when I knocked at No. 5, and asked for Miss Joyce, mentioning the three-pair back as directed, a slatternly maid pointed to the stair, lit by an ill-supplied lamp on the first landing; and through a din of ringing bells and loud talking from every room, through a steam of mingled coffee, dinners, and gin, I stumbled up three flights—narrow, steep, and sharp at the turns—to the

utmost attic, where I caught the well-known sound of Sally's voice in a high key of scolding, and by its help found a door in the darkness, knocked, and saw the first light fall on Rosanna's face as she opened it. With what a scream of delighted surprise the girl welcomed me! With what a flushed cheek and eye of dancing light she led me in with,

"Sally, Sally! here is Lucien!" The elder sister shrieked, and looked ready for a fit, and Jeremy, who had been probably the subject of her eloquence, rose out of his corner, and said, "Goodness me!" It was a low-roofed room, furnished in the make-shift manner of top rooms at the West-end: a ragged bit of carpet, in which one's feet got entangled; a crazy table, in danger of tilting up if things were not properly set in the centre; a few ancient and stuffy chairs, a sofa to match, and two half-curtained attic windows. I saw all that after I had seen Rosanna. She looked as pretty, as lively as ever, and had expected me, for her hair was in full flow of curls, and she had a new dress on.

Sally looked more disturbed in her mind than I had been accustomed to see her in Baltimore—things were not in the settling line with her;

but she had been scolding, and was taken by surprise. There was no change in Jeremy—time or travel could make none of his subjugated soul; but the brother and sister welcomed me with evident gladness. I heard all about their voyage, which had been a long one, and taken soon after my advising letter came to hand. Sally was clear on it that she must have died if they remained in America; the climate was entirely against her, and Jeremy was sure of a situation in London. I hinted that situations were not to be found at every step, but perhaps they had some prospect.

“Oh, yes; a good prospect—a very sure prospect,” said Sally, with great authority.

“Is it in this neighbourhood?” I was determined to know what brought them there.

“No, not exactly.”

“Because you will find it an expensive place to live in—these fashionable quarters always are: this top floor will cost you as much as very nice apartments in a quieter neighbourhood.”

“I can’t live in low corners; I never was brought up to it. Those two” (and Miss Joyce pointed at her brother and sister) “could do it

very well, I daresay. Their mother was a common person, but mine was a lady, Mr. La Touche, and I take after her. I must see life; I must have society."

To attempt reasoning with Sally on her prospects of seeing life, and having society in the three-pair back, was an undertaking beyond my courage, particularly as the lady could take fits. It was her whim to settle in an attic of Mayfair, just as it was to come home from Baltimore. Jeremy and Rosanna were mere counters in the game, in right of their mother being only a common person. There Sally was, and there she would stay till her brain took another turn; and I, seeing no promise of peace in it, waived the subject, asking Jeremy how he had left my uncle.

Mr. O'Neil was well, but there had been a report in Baltimore that he was going to get married; and Rosanna thought it must be true, for she had seen him at a door in the Virginia Villas, quite grand with his gold-headed cane and shoe-buckles. Somebody told her that the house belonged to Mrs. Maynard, a senator's widow, come of one of the first families in the town—a perfect madam. She had a son, a conceited young man, Rosanna thought; he

used to march along Baltimore-street as proud and high as if there was nobody good enough for him to look at. Jeremy added that he had been studying for the law, but changed his mind lately, and came to my uncle's counting-house, a sort of apprentice like, to learn the business, and Mr. O'Neil thought a deal of him.

There was the successor to my abandoned prospects, the man destined to occupy the place I had left vacant in my uncle's scheme. Well, I had chosen my lot and would abide by it; the pretty Rosanna sat by my side in the shabbiest of West-end attics, herself in a flush of delight, unconcerned about the shabbiness, and equally unconscious of the sacrifice thus forced on my attention. I would have done anything to protect her from that consciousness. It pressed heavily on my mind, now that I had additional responsibilities and no dependence but my own earnings, supplemented by the unrepayable friendship or charity of Mr. Forbes. It was perhaps an unnecessary effort to hide that root of bitterness, which made me say, with a gaiety I did not feel: "No doubt the old gentleman will marry the perfect madam, and adopt her son. Who can blame him? We would all marry, if we could."

"Every one can that wants to do it!" cried Sally, snatching at the words like an opportunity; "and I think it is quite time you and Rosanna should finish the business, now that you can keep a house."

"There are too many mistresses in it already," said I, hoping to foil the unexpected attack.

"Too many indeed, and of course it is all goodness in you; but what right have you, Mr. La Touche, to be saddled with such a tribe of women? I don't speak against keeping your sister—a brother can never value a sister too highly" (and she looked admonishingly at Jeremy); "but a grand-aunt, and a strange woman's daughter—dumb and mad, isn't she?—I think some of your relations, or somebody, ought to keep them, and let you fulfil your engagement honourably."

"I never meant to do otherwise, Miss Joyce, as you know very well; but my grand-aunt and poor widow Clark's daughter I am bound to maintain by every feeling of honour and duty. I have no relations who could or would do it; I cannot leave them destitute; and I love Rosanna too well to bring her home to such a family."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried my intended sister-in-law. "Do you think I would suffer you to put a ring on her finger till the house was clear of them? No! She'll have a hard enough trial in married life, I'll warrant—her that has been kept like a lady, without having an old woman's tempers and a mad girl to deal with! But the business must be finished, I tell you, once for all. I'll have no more hanging on or putting off. You have got a situation and a house, now is the time or never. If you are going to marry Rosanna, do it at once; and if you are not, say so, and let us understand one another."

"Miss Joyce," said I, "I wish above all things to marry your sister; it is the chief desire of my heart, the chief hope of my life, which I would do anything in conscience to fulfil; but I cannot, and I will not cast off my poor aunt and the dumb girl."

My last words were drowned in a shriek of, "Oh, you deceiver!"

"Now, Sally, don't," cried Rosanna, and Jeremy echoed that remonstrance; but it was to no purpose. Sally continued to rail at me and mine for imposing on her family, beguiling her sister's heart, with the worst intentions, and

making excuses to keep the girl from getting settled ; but she would show me that the Joyces were not to be made fools of. I had better not come there with my pretensions again.

She would lock Rosanna up if ever she spoke or wrote to me from that hour, and as I sprang to my feet, feeling the assault passed endurance, she uttered a sharper scream, and dropped on the floor in a fit. There was the usual fright and hurry getting her to bed, poor Rosanna and Jeremy all the while begging me not to mind what Sally said. It was just her way to work things up in that manner ; but she would come to herself by-and-bye.

I gave them what assistance I could ; went over the whole subject with the brother, when she was safely out of hearing, and the younger sister watching by her bedside in the adjoining room. Jeremy was sensible enough to see the difficulties of the case, and fully agreed in my views of duty ; but I knew that he must and would agree with Sally for all practical purposes, and it was with a weary, hopeless heart that I went down stairs, lighted by Rosanna, who took that opportunity to talk with me in private. If my own part of the business was hard, it was nothing to hers, shut up with and under the

dominion of that unresting, excitable, despotic sister, with her resolute whims and ever-recurring fits. My poor girl wept sore, leaning on my shoulder at the top of the steep stair, telling me there was no peace, with Sally always going on about my being in no haste to marry her, and meaning nothing but deceit and villany.

“She says there are plenty of better men I might have, now that your uncle is going to marry, and won’t do anything for you; and I am sure I don’t know what she means; but you won’t forsake me—you won’t break my heart, Lucien!”

I do not remember half of all I said to comfort Rosanna. My own heart was sore and heavily laden; there seemed no outlet from the necessities that hampered us; the troubles that warped and wore away our lives; and what seemed worse than all, though it lay unuttered in my mind, was a misgiving that our marriage would not bring us happiness, even if the way were clear. I had never felt so before, and I tried to fling off the feeling, for there seemed no reason in it. Sally Joyce was no worse prospect for a sister-in-law than she had ever been; perhaps her whims and fits were on the increase, and the present state of things had given her a

mighty opportunity to be troublesome. Jeremy was no more under her government than usual. It was his destiny, and he fulfilled it, poor fellow. Rosanna was as fair, as fond as ever, and my vows and protestations of truth to her were repeated in all honesty. Her face was clothed with smiles again, when Sally began to moan in the inner room, and I knew it was unfitting to stand longer on the stair; yet, when I got into the street and felt the cool air upon my brow, it was a positive relief to get away from all the Joyces.

I walked quickly out of the Row, taking no heed of my direction, and never pausing or looking about till I found myself in the middle of Curzon-street. The rain was over, and had left the air full of freshness and the sky full of stars, for it was night by this time—such night as still comes to Mayfair in the height of the London season, with the flare of lamps, the roll of carriages, the thunder of knockers, and the sight of ladies in full dress. Curzon-street seemed particularly occupied with something of the kind, and I perceived that the chief attraction to its discerning public was a mansion on the opposite side, lighted up from basement to attic, as

if for a grand gala; a double line of carriages in front, which every minute increased with new arrivals; a confused mingling of liveries and flowers half seen through its open door, as the full-dressed ladies and gentlemen swept in; and a much greater confusion of commands, remonstrances, and remarks, between the attendant lacqueys, the order-keeping police, and the crowd of link-boys and lookers-on.

I paused, for there was no passing till the fuss subsided. I had no interest in the Countess of This, or the Marchioness of That, on whom the crowd were making their remarks, loud enough, though not always complimentary, as the great people descended and disappeared; yet the mansion before me, blazing with festal splendour, and getting so full of company, caught my mind away from its private troubles, for in a servant who passed me, made his way through the crowd, and got in at the open door, I recognised, in spite of his rich livery, the grave, silent man in Eastern costume who had ushered me into the presence of Madame Palivez.

"Can you tell me to whom that house belongs, sir?" I said, addressing a gentleman who stood beside me among the more respect-


able portion of the gathering on the pavement, watching the arrivals, perhaps waiting to pass, but evidently in no great hurry, for he stood tapping the flags with his rattan, and humming a theatrical air to himself.

"It belongs to the great banking lady, as I suppose one may call her, Madame Palivez. She owns the Greek Bank in Old Broad-street; sole owner, and director, too, I understand. They say there is no end of her riches, and she is giving a ball to-night, you see, in honour of the Russian Ambassador and that old Princess who has come to visit him."

"Princess Lieven," said I, having learned so much of the great world from the newspapers.

"Yes, that's her name. A regular old witch to look at. If you had come five minutes sooner you might have seen her get out of the carriage. Not much of a sight for one to miss, though. Do you think it is true that she had a hand in taking off the Russian Emperor's father?"

"It is hard to know what may be true about court ladies," said I. "Is Madame Palivez supposed to be a friend of the Princess?"



“Oh! bless you, yes. She knows all that sort of people. The family came from Russia, I understand, though they are of Greek origin; but Madame is hand-and-glove with all the swells—fashionables, I mean—at home and abroad. Money, you perceive, answereth all things;” and the gentleman did something between a sigh and a swagger, which indicated to me that the article in question was not plentiful with him.

His appearance had caught my fancy and made me address the man, for my American breeding gave English manners a cold and repelling effect, and I found myself yet a stranger in the land. He was some inches less than myself, but substantially built, with a fair allowance of bone and muscle. He was some years older, too. His complexion might have been fair, but was bronzed with weather and travel; his hair was decidedly auburn, just escaping the red; his bushy whiskers had not come within the saving clause. The upper half of his face (that is to say, forehead and eyes) was handsome and expressive, but the lower was coarse and heavy. On the whole, there was more of breadth and massiveness than beauty. His dress was what young men

about town called swellish—rings, pins, and chains beyond the common in flash and quantity, but carelessly thrown on, with a wrinkled cravat, and shirt-front out of order. He was no dandy, but he liked finery and looked a gentleman in spite of it, though to what order, calling, or profession he might belong it were hard to guess.

There was a look of idleness, of being without occupation, and not knowing what to do with himself, about the man ; there was also an appearance of not being particular where he went or what he did ; yet withal, such an expression of honest, simple frankness, resolute courage, and boundless good-nature in his face, that I felt drawn to him on first sight. He was the man one could have had good fellowship with in social evenings, good help from in desperate circumstances ; not the best of advisers, not the safest of companions, perhaps, yet far more ready to go than lead astray ; and at worst, given only to play in the puddles or slip into the mires of life, never to dig its pitfalls, or spring its mines for others.


He stood there by my side, talking in an easy, friendly fashion, as if glad to find some

one he could talk and linger with, making off-hand strictures on such of the magnificent company as we could see getting out of their carriages; and when at length the arrivals ceased and the crowd began to give way, we parted with a civil "good evening," and I saw him take the very direction by which I had come, and walk straight into Bolton-row.

It was time to go home, and home I went, but slowly, and with many a backward look at the lighted-up house, and the crowd of carriages in front of it. That was Madame Palivez' West-end mansion, where she was at home and went out in the season. What wealth it must require to support such an establishment, to give such expensive entertainments! and how would the mere outlay of that evening, the mere equipments of one carriage full, jewellers' work considered, break down the barrier between Rosanna and me, and bring us happily to commence housekeeping together! The unequal division of things never pressed so heavily on my mind before. And then what riches must be at the disposal, in the command of that one solitary woman, without heirs or relations, for everybody said Madame was the last of the Palivez.

Why did she live unmarried? It was not for want of offers, with her wealth and her beauty, I thought, getting out of Curzon-street by this time, on my way home. What made me turn back to get another look at the mansion? The carriages and the crowd had rather increased, with the coming of late but distinguished guests, I judged by the bustle they made; and when elbowing nearer to get a better sight, somebody elbowed me a fierce, sharp thrust, as if the arm-bone had a dagger in it; and there leaning against a lamp-post, shoving everybody off, but looking only at the festal mansion, I saw Mr. Esthers.

He did not observe me; perhaps did not mean to observe. His mind was preoccupied, and with no pleasant thoughts, for a stranger who saw the sharp-eyed little man gazing at his employer's house would have been puzzled to say whether he was taking notes to report in some hostile and malicious newspaper, or making vituperative observations on the waste of his own patrimony. I looked at him in wonder; I looked at the house too. How did she look among that magnificent company? No doubt as queenly as I had seen her in those silent harem-like rooms of hers behind



the bank in Old Broad-street. How was she dressed? Was there any chance of her being seen at the lighted windows? What business was that of mine? I ought to be at home; and where was Esthers? He had slipped away through the crowd, as if towards Madame's house, but there I lost sight of him; and as I entered Bolton-row as the shortest way back to Oxford-street, there was a man knocking at No. 5, but the door had closed upon him before I reached it, and there was a bright, and, to me, a mysterious light in the attic.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ATTEMPTED MURDER.

I WALKED home through the cool starlight night, left the bustle and glare of the West-end behind me, and reached our own remote neighbourhood, then silent with country quiet, and sweet with the breath of green fields and blooming hawthorn. There was the little house—an honest and respectable, if not attractive home, and there was Rhoda at its door, looking anxiously out for her gentleman-brother, who happened to be later than usual.


She had a welcome for me as kindly, though it was not given with Rosanna's eyes; and when I got in, there was my grand-aunt, poor old Miss Livey, with her wrinkled face, slowly spinning in her accustomed corner, and Hannah Clark knitting quietly on a low stool by her side. The

old woman looked up and smiled as I entered, and the dumb girl sprang up with a joyful crow. They were all glad to see me—that simple helpless household missed me when I went out, and waited for my coming home. Yet I was lonely among them, and likely to be so; they formed a living rampart between me and Rosanna, and there was none whom I could take into confidence on that matter. I had not the heart to let even Rhoda know the cause of my late home-coming, for she, too, was involved; if it must be told some time, it could be postponed now, so I gave them to understand that business had detained me, made believe to eat my supper, and undertook to lock the outer door and make things generally safe, when they all retired to bed, and left me with candles and papers by way of excuse for remaining up in our little sitting-room. I had risen early, and been at work all day, but the scenes of the evening had banished sleep from my eyes, and there were restless thoughts, that seemed to have no connection, jostling each other in my mind.

Rosanna, her unlucky life, her termagant sister, my solemn engagement, it was taking the shape of a bond; yet did I not love the girl

who had so long loved and trusted me? Then my poor relations, the impossibility of ever providing for them and being able to marry. I could take counsel of nobody who would approve such a wedding: not Wilson nor Mr. Forbes, they were all the friends I had, and might help me in spite of disapprobation; but I wanted no more charity. Over and over the subject was turned, and ever through these home troubles of my humble life came the lighted mansion in Curzon-street, with the crowd, the carriages, and the gay company sweeping in. Through the deep silence of the sleeping house and the country neighbourhood I could hear in fancy the sound of music and dancing from that distant ball.

The light and splendour of those brilliant rooms which I had never entered flitted before my eyes—the forms, the dresses, and, chief of all, the lady of the festival; how did she look, how did she dance? and what was all that to me? I could not go to bed; I couldn't read; I could not fix on any course of conduct; I could not write to Melrose Morton, though each expedient was tried in turn as the hours wore away and my candle burned down. It would soon go out, but the grey light of the morning



was creeping in through my window-shutters. I opened them and looked out: there was the summer daylight stealing over the sky in its early whiteness, the stars were going down behind woods and hills, and there was a rising flush in the east right over London.

The last of the carriages would have driven away by this time; Madame Palivez would have turned out of her deserted ball-room, and cast off dress and jewels, weary enough, no doubt, and glad to go to sleep. Was that the lark I heard waking up among the meadows? There was no use in me going to sleep now, I felt strangely wakeful and active; and there came, I never could say whence or why, a sudden impulse to go out; and out I went, unbarring the door and closing it behind me as securely and quietly as possible.

The morning air was fresh and cooling; I walked on through the growing light and dewy fragrance, heard the lark singing far above, envied his free life, unburdened with thought or care, custom or duty, as many a man has done. He had his love and home without fear of inadequate provision, engagements or obligations, and I had a sister, a grand-aunt, and Hannah Clark, not to speak of Jeremy and Sally Joyce,

in prospect, if the connexion could ever become possible.

I passed the Notting Hill turnpike, and through the village street, where the earliest labourer was not yet stirring. I saw Mr. Forbes' house lying grey and silent among its grounds; I looked up the hill-side path among the trees where the lady had alighted and the horse had drunk at the stream. I had found the signet-ring there which kept good fortune in her family; strange notion, and strange that I should find it! My steps had turned in the direction as if by instinct; I was going up to the very spot; but what sounds were those far up the winding path—growls, scuffling, the tramp of a horse's hoofs, and at last a human voice? It was a man saying in a hoarse screech, "You murdered him! I know you did, and I'll finish you, you sorceress."

I rushed to the spot from whence the voice proceeded, and there on the steepest part of the hill, where the path was narrowest and the trees grew thickest, was Madame Palivez, green habit and all, mounted on her Arab horse, and urging the noble creature with all her might to strain away from a man who had caught by the bridle, which had partly given way in his grasp, and

was lunging at her with a long, sharp knife. Another thrust, and he must have reached her ; but I was upon him before he was aware, seized his uplifted arm, wrenched the knife out of his hand, flung it far into the thicket, and hurled him backwards to the ground, rending the bridle-rein at the same moment, and setting the Arab free. Away it bounded like an arrow, but I heard Madame cry, " Stop, Zara !" and she was again by my side, while I tried to hold the man down. He was a wild, fierce creature, with ragged clothes, tangled hair, and eyes full of the fire of madness, but worn to skin and bone, and not my match in strength. Yet it was a desperate struggle for some minutes : he gnashed his teeth, tried to tear me with his long nails, and struck out with his heels like a vicious horse. " For Heaven's sake keep off, Madame !" I cried, as she approached. Her face was deadly pale, yet there was more of resolution than fear in it.

" Hold him, if you can," she said, and then up went a small silver bugle to her lips, and a long shrill blast made the park about us ring ; the next moment I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and two mounted grooms came galloping up the hill. She made a sign to one of them—

it was the silent servant Calixi—they both sprung from their horses, seized on the man, whom I had almost mastered, while he continued to gnash his teeth, and cry—"You murdered him! I know you did, you sorceress."

"Leave him to them," she said, motioning me away. "You have saved my life; do me one other service; go home and speak nothing of this adventure to anyone till we meet again."

"I will obey you to the letter, Madame; but may I not see you safe to your villa?"

"No, no," she said, impatiently, "there is no danger now; go home and do not speak of it—I request—I entreat you!"

And with some words—I think they were Greek—to the silent servant, she rode rapidly away.


They had got the man bound with some of their horse gear, and silenced too, by this time; it was done so quietly and quickly I could not tell how. He was manifestly mad; yet that silent servant had some mode of subduing his fierceness. I had heard him whisper something in a foreign tongue as they were binding the man, whom they had got up now, and Calixi was marching him away; I should like to have known where, but he motioned me to go, exactly

as Madame had done, and being bound by promise, I left, and soon lost sight of them among the trees. If anybody had heard the shrill blast of that silver bugle, except those for whom it was intended, they had all gone to sleep again ; the road, the village, all lay silent in the early morning light ; nobody at home seemed to have been disturbed by my going out or coming in, and weary, bewildered, and with some bloody scratches on my face and hands, I crept up to my own bed-room to prevent wonder or observation, just as the house-clock struck four.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SECRET MEETING.

THANKFUL to God for having been preserved, and for being able to serve my benefactress, I had slept in spite of the daylight and the strange adventure, for nature was worn out—slept too deeply for dream or consciousness of life, till somebody called me by name. It was Rhoda at my room-door, with “Lucien, dear, it’s half-past eight, and I came to call you, for fear of your being too late for the bank.” “Thank you, Rhoda; I will be ready in five minutes.” Ready I was, but the glass showed me grievous evidences of that fierce struggle on the hill-side path; the marks of the wild creature’s claws were in my face like those of a mountain cat. I covered them as well as I could with court-plaster which happened to be by me, and I made a point of



telling them at breakfast that I had cut myself accidentally with my razor.

"Goodness be about us! but you must have done it in style," said Miss Livey, surveying my plastered countenance; "that shaving is a dangerous business, Lucien; you ought to take better care."

"Aunt, dear, maybe he couldn't," said Rhoda; "at any rate, the cuts will soon get well, as every cut does with him. Don't you mind when we were all at home in Armagh, he nearly took his thumb off whitling sticks with the carving-knife, and it was well in no time?"

"Ay, that was the summer before Raymond went off. How he nursed and comforted the child! Who would have thought he could ever have done as he did!" Miss Livey would have gone on with reflections on that subject; she was terribly given to turn to it in those latter years of hers; but Rhoda let the house-keys fall—it was one among many expedients the good girl had for stopping her; the reproof and the defence upon it got over the rest of the breakfast time, and then my untroubled sister saw me out at the door, with the assurance that nobody could help cutting themselves, and she knew my face would soon be well.

The girl had sense enough to keep the secret ; but I had promised not to tell it, though it was filling all my thoughts. I hoped the bank people would believe something about the razor, but as everybody kept their distance there, no remarks were made, and Esthers was not in the office. By a city man's wanting to see him about an hour after, I found out that he was not in the house, and the forenoon passed without his appearance. Such absence was very unusual with the manager. I noticed, but did not regret it ; there was more leisure to speculate on the event of the early morning, which had submerged in my mind all that passed before it. Would Esthers be made acquainted with it, or was the secret to be kept from him too ? Why was it kept at all ?—and who could that emaciated maniac be ? What were his mad motives for attacking Madame at such a place and time ? I recalled his features, they were stamped on my memory ; his evident insanity—his strange expressions—"You murdered him ! I know you did, you sorceress." That was but the raving of madness. Nobody believed in sorcery now ; and murder—that fine figure, classic face, and alabaster hand, all telling of refined, luxurious life, had nothing to do with crime—it was

clearly madness. Yet why did she utter no cry for help, and only sound the summons to her on-coming servants when his knife was gone and the maniac could do little harm? Why did she enjoin me not to speak of it, "till we meet again!"

Those words of hers kept ringing in my ears. When would that meeting be, and should I get a full explanation then? Come what would, I should try to get one. There was something in the man's voice and features known to my memory, but how or where they had been met with before I could not imagine. Would it all pass as the finding of her signet-ring had done? I was determined it should not, however unhandsome the forcing myself into her secret might appear. I had a concern, an interest in it, not possible to explain to myself. She said I had saved her life, and so I had, beyond a doubt. The great lady of the bank and of Mayfair owed me that obligation; it was but a lucky chance, a thing I ought to have done, yet my heart swelled with pride at the recollection; and poverty, my grand-aunt, and Sally Joyce, were forgotten.

Weary with turning over these puzzles, not over-occupied with my work, and actively sleep-

less all the preceding night, I had fallen into a doze with my head and hands leant on the desk in the quiet office, sensible only of the heat and hum of the surrounding city in the summer afternoon, when the door creaked and somebody slipped in. It was Esthers coming back with unusual silence. The manager was a common apparition, and I was not afraid to be caught dozing, yet the first look of his face made me spring to my feet with an uncontrollable impulse, for it explained one of my puzzles. There was the resemblance I had seen and could not understand in the man on the hill-side. It could not be; it was not the same face; the tangled hair, the wild eyes, the rags and emaciation made a difference, but my eye had taken in the likeness and could not get quit of it. Contrary to his general custom, Mr. Esthers made no remark on my confusion. Something seemed to occupy himself, and in no pleasant manner; he said good day civilly, sat down in his place, began to work on the bank books with great application; but I heard him sigh as he turned the pages—by-the-bye, he ground his teeth also, and muttered to himself “One’s own turn, perhaps.” Towards evening he got into his old way, chatted with me familiarly on matters of business, and gave me to understand

in an easy, off-hand manner, that he had been out all the morning on Madame's affairs.

There was no allusion to the ball in Curzon-street, at which I had seen him cast such malign looks—not the slightest to the tragical event that followed it, though every glance and movement reminded me of the man clutching the broken bridle and lunging with the long sharp knife. It was not he, yet it was like him, and Esthers could not be in the secret, or he would have known my part in it and made some ill-natured remark; the clerk that saved his superior lady's life would not have been a pleasing subject to our manager. Let me confess that I lingered on the road that warm bright evening in hopes of hearing the Arab's hoofs and seeing the green habit, as if that had been her rendezvous. I had no notion of her being frightened from it or anything else by her adventure on the hill-side path; there was a look of calm and resolute courage above that of most men mingling with her feminine beauty; but neither hoof nor habit came. I chid myself for losing time in such foolish expectations, and went home to get a good night's rest.

Next day was Saturday, when the bank

closed early. I was accustomed to go to Mr. Forbes, and Esthers and our Jewish clerks to the synagogue; they kept only the fag end of their own Sabbath, and played nine-pins most of the Christian Sunday. The bank was closed, and I was in the middle of Thread-needle-street looking for a coach to get home quickly and be dressed in time for dinner at Notting Hill House, when a voice behind said in my very ear,

“Madame Palivez will be glad to see the signor half an hour hence, if he will go to the Greek Coffee-house in Finsbury Pavement and wait till her messenger comes.”

“Happy to obey Madame’s commands,” said I, looking round at Calixi. He disappeared through the crowd, and I made my way to the old Greek Coffee-house.

There were only two or three Russians there, smoking and making some bargain. I sat down in the identical box where I had sat on Christmas-day, and heard Wilson telling my own sad family secret.


It was only Midsummer now, yet what events had thickened round my life since then! the last having far the firmest hold on my mind. It was little more than twenty minutes by the

clock, but it seemed hours to me till Calixi came to me. He came with the merest sign, and I rose and followed him out of the coffee-house, and across the Pavement, and into the labyrinth of small narrow streets which lay between the back of Madame's bank and Finsbury. They were more numerous and intricate in that direction at that period than at present; fires and improvements have done a good deal to alter the neighbourhood, and between them swept away an ancient Greek church and its cemetery which stood at the intersection of Winch and Blomfield-streets, so closely hemmed in by old houses that only a narrow and almost darkened passage between them and the church-wall gave entrance to the burying-ground. This was our way, one of whose existence I had never dreamt.

The houses were mostly stores belonging to Greeks, Jews, and Russians, who then kept their depots in that quarter; their back windows, which would have looked into the churchyard, were all shut, and seemed to have been so for years; it was overgrown with long grass, weeds, and nettles, as silent and shut out from the world as if it had been in the midst of a forest. Funerals could not have been frequent there, for there

were no new graves to be seen ; the church was ruinous, particularly in the rear, the green moss grew thick upon its walls, and sparrows flew out and in through its broken windows. Right opposite, and bounding the churchyard, there rose a wall high and massive enough to be the outwork of a castle ; as we approached it, I noticed a beaten path through the thick growing weeds, which led straight to a narrow door hung on stone lintels and bound with iron ; here my guide paused, inserted a small key in the lock, turned it without noise, and admitted me into one of the most beautiful conservatories I have ever seen.

It must have been a kind of courtyard originally, but was roofed with glass of all colours, through which the sunshine fell in broken and brilliant rainbows on the white marble floor, adorned with statues, fountains, and vases of porcelain, Bohemian glass, and alabaster, in which all manner of exotic plants, shrubs, and even orange trees were growing. I think the silent servant enjoyed my look of amazement—the transition from the old overgrown churchyard was so unexpected and surprising ; but with the same grave immoveable face he conducted me up a broad stair, steps and banister of white marble,



to an upper conservatory, and thence into the Eastern-like saloon where I had my first audience of Madame Palivez.

There she sat, not now in purple velvet, but a summer dress of fine India muslin striped with gold, made in a fashion which no milliner in Mayfair could have tolerated ; I knew that, slight as was my acquaintance with ladies' ware. It was a classic robe, its folds gracefully fitted to her full but perfect figure, and bound round the waist with a broad purple sash. Her long abundant hair was more loosely braided for the summer time, and instead of the gold net and pins, she wore a wreath of the white japonica, which I think was natural.

"Good evening, my friend," she said, extending her white hand with the signet-ring on it, while the loose Greek sleeve showed me a beautifully rounded arm and filigree gold bracelets ; "I may well call you so, after the service rendered me so lately. Do be seated," and she pointed to an opposite sofa.

I had come determined to get things explained, but the scene, the lady, somehow took me off my guard. I sat down, saying nothing, and feeling that I had nothing to say. But Madame had something, and went on—

"You came most opportunely ; the unfortunate man certainly would have killed me ! He is insane, you are aware ; has been in a lunatic asylum for nearly seven years, and made his escape about the middle of last week. Our house, owing to special family arrangements, is charged with his guardianship ; hence his hatred to myself : it is a common effect of madness to make people hate all in authority over them, is it not ?"

"I believe it is, Madame ; and he is evidently mad."

"Yes, it is the misfortune—the heirloom of his family," she spoke slowly and with cold composure ; "a solemn, silent, melancholy madness, subject to sudden fits of violence, and sure to sink into the lowest type of idiocy."

"A sad heirloom, indeed, Madame."

"Yes, young man. Would all the wealth of London make you wish to belong to such a family ?"

"Certainly not," it was from my heart ; "but does the insanity descend to them all ?"

"All, to the utmost generation, root and branch, with little modification, except in the matter of time."

"He is remarkably like Mr. Esthers," said I, gathering up my resolution.

"He is," said Madame, without the slightest emotion, and there was something in her eyes I could not question; "it is not possible to account for these resemblances. He has been restored to the asylum—a proper and humanely managed one—to my certain knowledge. Being insane, his attack on me is a matter to be passed over and forgotten, certainly not to be spoken of for the benefit of idle gossips, and the vexation of unfortunate relatives. There are few families that have not some serpent's nest, as they in Asia; a skeleton in the closet, as Europeans say;" and she looked me keenly in the face.

My family history was known to that great lady, and I could only answer, "It is true."

"For that reason, I requested you to keep silence on the subject, and now that we have met, I believe that I can depend on your discretion."

"You may, Madame; if you think it advisable that the matter should not be spoken of, I am not the person who would or should make it public."

"I believe you," she said, "most sincerely; but tell me one thing—how did you happen to be so early abroad, and in such good time for me?"

"I could not sleep, Madame, and went out to get the air."

"Not sleep at your time of life, my friend!—oh, but our sleep is broken early and often before we come to the long one. You walked a good way; it was a pleasant morning; I was riding alone to my villa, and had bidden the servants follow, not knowing he was out. It was strange that I could not find my bugle till you came up, and I would not blow till you took the knife; he might have attacked and killed some of them."

"Better them than you, Madame."

"No; they have relations, friends who would miss them, and nobody would miss me."

"Madame, you cannot think so, with all your advantages and——"

"Wealth you mean." It was beauty I had been going to say, but I added, "Yes, that is a great help to one's being missed."

"Oh no, my friend, it remains behind us; all it could buy—all it could bribe for us—honour, influence, fashion, luxury, they are left to go with it to others—to enemies; and we must go to the clay."

She spoke in a dreary, hopeless tone that smote me to the heart. I had known the varied ills of

poverty ; was this the one great woe of riches, that people must die and leave them ? They had told me that all the Palivez died at middle age ; yet it was only speaking my thoughts when I said, “ There is a long way between you and the clay yet, Madame.”

“ There is not—there cannot be ; young man, you do not know that there are evils which make us fly to it—evils which no wealth can bribe away, no success atone for—which cling to us and ours in spite of honour and fortune—black shadows cast over all our days, on all our sunny mornings and festive nights, coming on to meet us in palpable shape as we advance along the path of years, and no turning from them, but that which leads down to dust and darkness.”

Alas ! this woman—beautiful and fair—rich above almost all—learned, revered, beloved—had no other faith than this !

She was speaking slowly, calmly, but in such a tone as that in which the night wind wailing through ruins speaks to one’s fancy. Never were my senses so utterly confounded and set at variance as to hear that beautiful woman in her gay summer dress and rich surroundings, speak words of such mysterious and terrible import. There was something ghastly and spectral

in the contrast—it was the skeleton at the feast, and an indefinite fear came over me; something like the feeling with which I woke at night from dreams of my lost brother.

What black shadows could she mean? was the woman speaking of herself, of her own experience, or only of things which she had read or heard of—which her imagination dwelt on, in that isolated life she pleased to lead, its hours not all filled up with bank business or fashion? She sat there before me, wearing the same fixed look with which she had spoken so darkly; no agitation, no excitement in the beautiful intellectual face, but it had grown stony and statuesque, reminding me somehow of the sphinx, and gazing at me as if she expected an answer.

“I cannot understand you, Madame; there are evils in life which money cannot buy off, I know—bad health, personal afflictions, and the like; but what can you have to complain of—young, handsome, and happily situated as you are.”

“I am not young in the reckoning of one at your years; but we will speak of something more interesting,” she said, with sudden stateliness—the lady of the bank addressing her clerk once more; “you have done me a great and un-

common service ; it is my desire as well as my duty to reward, that is, to acknowledge it ; tell me in what way I can do so most useful or agreeable to you."

I had been thrown back for miles by the first queenly word and look. She had encouraged me to forget myself, and I had done it. Was it for that she had brought me there, and got into familiar talk ? The mistress of the bank should see that I had been born a gentleman, and was not to be rewarded or paid for service like her groom ; a free man also, not to be drawn out at her pleasure or sport, and sent back into his corner again, like one of the Eastern slaves to whom she was accustomed.

"Madame Palivez," said I, and the opposite mirror showed me that there was full-blown pride and suppressed anger in the look I gave her, straight in the face, "I expect and will receive no reward for what you are good enough to call my service. I did nothing on that occasion but what an honest man should have done for any lady, any person in like peril ; mere accident brought me to the spot, and I am glad that my early walk enabled me to be of some use to you."

I had risen at the conclusion of my speech,

determined to take leave at once, but she held out her hand, and said, with a look of arch familiarity altogether irresistible, "My dear fellow, you are a fool. Allow me to tell you, you will never get on in this world, without putting a proper value on your own performances, and getting profit out of them. Sit down there, and don't be in such a hurry to take fire when one only wants to acknowledge one's obligation; we rich people cannot allow ourselves to be in such debt without giving a testimonial—an I O U of some sort, you understand. Sit down; stay to dinner with me, like a good boy."

She positively directed me back to my seat with the extended hand which I had taken instinctively; what a firm clutch those fine taper fingers had! and I sat down, feeling that the world was made new between us; we were back on the old footing of intimacy, almost of friendship; it was another turn of her game, but I did not see the move.

I was engaged to dine with Mr. Forbes and his daughter; I knew they would expect me by this time. Helen would be sitting at work and looking out of the bay window, as I had seen her many a Saturday evening; her father would

be wondering, the dinner would be waiting ; but I forgot all that, and when she repeated, "Do stay to dinner," I merely answered, "Madame, I am not dressed." It was all that would come out from the tumult of my thoughts. "Never mind," said Madame, "I have seen people dine in all sorts of dresses, and yours seems as good as the most of them. We are not in Mayfair, thank Heaven, and need not be afraid of the butler and footman ; you can't be more fastidious than a lady, you know ; stay and dine with me ; I really cannot part with you this evening."

What answer but one of acceptance could be made to that ? I know not in what words mine was given, but I stayed. There was no more talk about the service or the reward—no further allusion to the black shadows. She was gay, friendly, and entertaining, showed me through her rooms—a handsome suite they were, all furnished in the same half-Oriental fashion, comparatively empty to an English eye : the low sofas, small tables, and richly-wrought cushions scattered here and there, would not have been thought sufficient to furnish a well-to-do tradesman's back parlour, as far as quantity went ; but everything was of the finest

workmanship and material; mirrors and hangings, pictures and statues were there, not numerous, but of rare excellence: and I remarked that all the objects of art were either antiques or by the old masters. They had been collected from far climes and ages; there were curtains worked in the old Byzantine looms, when silk was the monopoly of the Greek Empire, and bought for its weight in gold by Western princes; there were vases from Etruscan tombs, amber cups made in Novgorod, with the Palivez crest upon them, a broken crown, and the Greek motto graven on the inside of her ring, she said, "Suffer and reign." There were ornaments of malachite, opal, and gold from the Uralian mines, ivory images carved in Kamtschatka; and, chief of all, the marble gods and graces of the antique world. My connoisseurship was small, but I always knew the beautiful, and had never seen so much of it before. She showed me all, told me curious particulars of them, and their adventures; how they had come into her hands, what previous owners and travels they had; the times and countries to which the most ancient, or strange to me, belonged.

There was something remarkable or amusing

repeated about every one, except a picture which seemed to me somewhat out of place: it was a full-length portrait of a woman in an ancient and foreign costume, rich furs, and massive jewels, with a face of the decidedly Tartar type, undoubted Calmuck, a high stiff cap, made of gold plates and black fox-skins on her head, and a look of silent, solemn, concentrated anger. The picture was hung in a conspicuous place in Madame's largest and handsomest saloon; rich in art, and opening on the conservatory; close by it stood an antique statue, a draped figure, with a face of which one could hardly say that it belonged to boy or maiden: young it was, but sternly beautiful.

The one hand clutched a weapon, and the other a cup half concealed by its robe; the head was crowned with a garland of cypress and Madame said, "It is the Athenian Nemesis, taken from her temple when they made a Christian church of it, in the middle of the fourth century, and saved from destruction with much difficulty—for the new creed was most hostile to that goddess—by an ancestor of mine who lived and died a pagan, and left it, with other heir-looms, to our house." But she made no



of intellectual life, of travel, of observation, of knowledge!—how free from care or trammels, as if nothing had ever hampered her in wish or thought, and into what a world of light and gaiety it transported me!

We talked of books, of foreign places she had seen, and fashionable people she associated with in Mayfair. She pressed me to the wine, told me anecdotes of its age and quality; there was some that had been made in Cyprus, in the crusading time; some that a Turkish vizier had drunk too much of at the siege of Rhodes. I drunk because she bid me, and thought the Turk excusable, though his Koran stood in the way, but I did not quite follow his example. She had poured out a glass for me with her own fair hands,

“Will you not drink my health?” she said, with a smile which seemed to light up the wine with the sun of its native summers; “you have not done so yet.”

“It was not for want of wishing it, Madame.”

“I believe in your good wishes—you have proved them by good service; but ladies always demand pledges of their true knights. Will you do me a service more, and we will be

friends, good and faithful friends, without pride or misunderstanding?"

"I would do anything, anything in the world to serve you, Madame." Was I going to be trusted with the entire secret?—was I to be sent anywhere on her service? The words were from my heart out.

"Well, what I ask is in your power, and will serve me. Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman, which I know you are by nature and descent—yes, La Touche is an ancient name among the nobles of Normandy, and your ancestors came into Ireland with the Fitzgeralds and Delacys—all the Palivezi have studied genealogy, but that is not to my purpose. Will you promise me never to mention to man or woman, myself included, the chance scene you saw and shared in at the dawn of Friday morning, or anything concerning it?"

Was this all? and why was it? I dared not question; but I said, with a good deal of surprise and disappointment, "I promise you that, Madame, on the honour of a gentleman."

"Give me your hand in pledge," she said, extending her own.

Our hands met above the wine, and the clasp went to my heart. How firm and friendly it

was! I felt my fingers lingering upon hers, but she hastily withdrew them, rang for coffee, and asked me whether I preferred the face of the Venus or the Diana which stood, one on either side, among the orange-trees. I think my answer was that I did not know; on which she laughed at me, and said many a man did not know his own preferences.

The rest of our conversation I cannot recal, except that it was about styles of beauty. It is my belief that I was not very bright on it. But at last I saw her looking at the timepiece—by-the-bye, it was of old Venetian make, very richly wrought, and of a quaint device; a veiled figure showed the hours; as they progressed, the veil was slowly withdrawn, but the first half revealed the profile of a beautiful woman, and the second that of a skeleton. She looked at the timepiece. I saw it was late, and rose to go.

“Good night!” she said, giving me her hand without rising; “but one word before we part. We have agreed to be friends without pride or misunderstanding, have we not?”

“Certainly, Madame.”

“Well, then, the first requisite of friendship is plain speaking. Should you like to come and

see me on honest, equal terms, for the interchange of thought and mutual help, to pass the hours that might otherwise be heavy or barren?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Madame."

"Well, but understand this friendship of ours stands apart and utterly separated from our public lives: there, you are the bank clerk, and I am Madame Palivez. We were nothing more till within the last month, when the stars brought us nearer; whether for good or evil I know not yet, but I augur well from your finding the signet-ring."

"Madame, I should be happy to be your friend on any terms."

I spoke in all sincerity, though with some surprise at the strange prudence of her arrangement. It might not have worked well with every one, but she knew her man, and smiled kindly on me as she answered.

"Those are the only terms I have to offer. We meet here, or in my villa, as friends, honest and equal; in public, we keep our respective stations. What the world does not understand should never be said before it, and friendship is a sacred thing, not to be wondered about

and misinterpreted by common minds. Your face has told me that you understand this, or I should never have spoken it."

"I do understand you, and will keep my share of the compact."

"Yes, that is a good word for it. You will keep the compact honourably in spirit and in letter, or I have not read your countenance correctly; and if so, it is the only page of the kind that ever foiled me. But we are friends. Good night! for I know it is late, and your way is long."

CHAPTER XVII.

RHODA AND LUCIEN.

It was late when I got home, but the summer night was lovely, and a new life went with me through the busy streets and quiet suburban ways.

Madame Palivez, the wonderful woman whom I had heard so much of, whom I had been so curious about, whom I had served, and could not take reward from, had chosen, nay, appointed me to be her private friend; to come and see her at her villa, or her secluded Eastern rooms behind the bank, for the interchange of thought or the passing of leisure hours on honest, equal terms, of which the world was to know nothing. Strange as it may appear, there was no part of the arrangement in which my mind acquiesced so fully as the latter clause. I did not then know

why ; but that friendship seemed to me a fairy treasure not to be profaned by vulgar eyes or comments, and more securely mine because of its secrecy.

Rhoda opened the door to me with a face of great gladness at my safe return, and much wonder where I could have been.

“ You are come at last, Lucien dear. I have had your supper ready these two hours, and got my aunt and Hannah to bed to keep them from grumbling. You see, my aunt got into quite a bad way when Mr. Forbes sent over, about six o’clock, to know why you were not coming. It was his own footman, Lucien : and he brought us such a lovely pheasant for to-morrow’s dinner. I am so sorry I bought that bit of mutton ; howensoever, it will keep till Monday ; and the Forbes’ must think a good deal of you to send so. I was very sorry, but I could not tell them where you were. My aunt got bothered about it, and in course she bothered the house.”

“ I am sorry, too, Rhoda ; but I could not help it. I was detained by business.”

The first part of that speech was as true as the second was false. My heart smote me for having overlooked and broken through the long

and friendly engagement of my Saturday evenings spent at Notting Hill House, when no other had a welcome for me, and all the kindness that my family had received from that quarter. The Forbes' missed me—that was evident; but I had not missed them. It must be made up for by apologies, and they must be fibs, every word: that was the first consequence of the compact I had made so willingly, and was so resolute to keep.

Poor Rhoda was not quite convinced of my detention by business. The girl had some penetration, though she could never learn to spell, the reading of her brother's face was a task more to her mind. She brought up the fat pheasant to display it in the Forbes' honour; said she was sure they must have been disappointed; and it was a pity the bank people kept me so late, for I might have gone over and told them all about it.

"It is a fine house for you to go to, Lucien dear, and I think Miss Forbes likes to see your face as well as her father," and Rhoda looked knowing.

"Miss Forbes is friendly to us all, Rhoda, but she is a rich banker's daughter, and we are

poor folks ; besides you know I am engaged to Rosanna Joyce."

"Oh, in course, I didn't mean anything but fun ; but my aunt took on dreadful ; and, Lucien dear, you would not be going to bad places, and staying out at nights, as she says young men do in London ?"

"No, Rhoda, my good sister, I would not, never did, and never will, whatever my aunt may grumble about. You know she is an old woman, and you must try to keep her quiet. I can't always explain to you what detains me ; there may be causes which you would not understand now, but I will tell you some other time ; and be sure of one thing, that however often I go out, or late I may stay, it will not be in low company or bad places."

"Oh, I know you are too gentle for that, and too good, Lucien," said my honest, kindly sister, looking all she spoke.

What would have been her exultation of heart had she known that my evening was spent, as many were likely to be, with the great lady of the bank in Old Broad-street, the high and mighty Madame Palivez ? Our confidence was not far enough advanced for that disclosure ;

but she left me with a happy look, fully insured against the bad places, and in the conviction that I would make all right with the Forbes'.

I took early precautions for that purpose. There was a note, containing the same story I had told my sister, but more ceremoniously set forth, unavoidably detained at the bank; not aware that I should be till the last moment, with suitable regrets and acknowledgments, left in the hands of a servant at their door next morning, which being Sunday, I knew they kept after the strictest fashion of Scotland, neither receiving visitors nor going out of doors, except to church, and my tale was more easily written than told. I could not rest at home that Sunday; I could not go to the Catholic chapel with my aunt and sister.

They were still faithful children of Mother Church, particularly Miss Livey, though I had become lax and somewhat of a stray sheep. Many a lecture the old woman read me on it at our Sunday dinners, setting forth where I might expect to go in terms not to be misunderstood; but my acquaintance with the warring creeds, and their mode of carrying

on the long campaigns against each other, together with the habit of thinking for myself, which I had learned in that lonely life of mine, did not contribute to make me sound in my faith. Moreover, Catholic chapels, even in the neighbourhood of London, were poor places in those no-Popery days. The scenic accompaniments must be in good style to save that ritual from becoming ridiculous. I could not stand the ill-served ceremonies, and worse painted saints, which, doubtless, forwarded my family's devotion, with the pictures and statues in those grand, silent rooms, and the talk I had heard about them still fresh in my memory.

I walked away miles into the country, through lanes and bye-ways, among green meadows and growing corn. It was a glorious summer day, and people were abroad in all the roads and villages. I was alone, as I had always been, but the Saturday evening went with me, and when I sat down to rest in the hidden nook of a solitary hedgerow, I found myself thinking of Madame Palivez and her strangely offered friendship.

Next evening I recollected that I ought to go and see Rosanna when the day's work was done. She had not written to me after all the trouble

in which we parted. It was the dread of Sally that kept me away. That she would think of course, yet I ought to go ; so I went and got into Curzon-street, though it was not the shortest way. There was one carriage at the door of the mansion where the ball had been—it was Madame's own. I knew it by the arms on the panels ; and in the shelter of a convenient doorway, so as not to be seen watching, I waited till she came out, full dressed for dinner in the newest and most fashionable style, with floating lace and flashing diamonds ; but the fine face and figure were still the same. I saw her step into the carriage as lightly as she had sprung from her Arab horse, throw herself back with a careless, half-scornful air, like one that knew and did not value her grandeur, and I heard her say to the coachman—" Carlton House." The supreme lady of the great banking-house had invitations from the Prince Regent, perhaps had a right to them. The princely purse was known to be more frequently empty than full, and the Palivez had always done a good deal of court business. At any rate, there would be no brighter ornament in his select society. Was she a different woman there from what I had found her ? There was something in her style

of stepping into the carriage which told me she was, and little as I knew of fashionable life I felt it must be so, and felt too, with a chagrin I could not account for, how great was the distance between what she called our public lives. Perhaps I ought to have felt flattered—lifted up and made great in my own esteem, because a lady who went to Carlton House, and owned wealth and influence enough to make her a leader of fashion, if so minded, should have chosen me for her private friend. Yet my feathers fell instead of rising at that gay sight.

“You are the bank clerk, and I am Madame Palivez,” came back upon me with a shocking sense of unfitness and incompatibility and I went in a dreary humour to Bolton-row. Never did the Joyces’ rooms look so squalid and disorderly; never did Sally appear more dreadful, Jeremy more despicable, or Rosanna more uneducated though her new dress was on, and her hair not in papers, without the slightest intimation of my coming; and the poor girl received me as kindly as if I had not been careless and neglectful in seeing her but once since she came. Her elder sister made up for it by two or three keen snaps, but, on the whole, Sally was a great deal better than might have been expected. She

brought up the marriage question only in a modified form, and I took the customary affectionate leave of Rosanna at the top of the stairs, promising to come back soon and take her out some evening to the theatre.

All that week I had fears that the Forbes' might be offended. I saw none of them, and did not like to call. Notting Hill House had never been a cheerful mansion, and its gloom deepened of late, to my fancy; but Mr. Forbes had been the untiring friend of my family. Had he not cheered my father's dying, broken-hearted days, and given him the handsomest funeral that ever went out of the Marshalsea? Had he not helped to get up a home for my destitute relations; and were not his countenance and counsel still the chief help we had? I could not forget these things, and it was hard to think of having put an apparent slight on his friendship. So it seemed like a Godsend when going home from business on the following Friday, we happened to meet hard by the Mansion House, and he held out his hand to me with the accustomed kindness of look and tone.

"You are going home?" he said, after friendly inquiries for all my household, "and so am I; hadn't we better walk together it will be pleasant

now, in the cool of the evening." I agreed, and we walked on, talking in a serious, kindly way, as was his wont. "We were sorry you could not come to us on Saturday evening to meet my nephew, Charles Barry. His ship has come in from the Mediterranean. They have had a long cruise, and must refit; so Charles is a sailor on shore, not very well knowing what to do with himself, I believe. He comes to us sometimes, but our house is scarce lively enough for a young naval officer. Charles is promoted to be second lieutenant now. I wish he were more serious, more thoughtful, I should say; but his company on board ship are not likely to help him forward in that way, though they see the works of God in the deep, and his wonders in the great waters. I think you would like Charles; I am sure he would like you. Helen and I had set our minds on introducing you that evening, for he is gone to Portsmouth now."

I repeated the story of my note with as honest a look as I could assume under the circumstances; but the banker's Scottish eye was upon me, and something very like doubt in it as he said—

"I did not know you did business so late in the Palivez' bank, and your manager a Jew. Is

it possible that Esthers has so little respect for his people's Sabbath?"

"I believe most Jews regard it very little now; they are probably getting out of their old superstitions, and feel that they must advance with the rest of the world," said I, willing to let the small blame rest on the manager; "but——"

"Stop, lad," said Mr. Forbes. "It was part of the law delivered in thunder on Mount Sinai, and though they have shown a superstitious regard for the letter of it in our Gospel ages, remember any Sabbath is better than none. The one day set apart from worldly cares and employments gives man time to think of eternal things, and brings him near to his Maker. The Jews were an example to Christians in their Sabbath-keeping, but I fear that, as you say, they are growing careless of it now in this busy London."

We were out of London by this time, and quickening our pace along the Uxbridge road, for a heavy cloud had come over the evening sky; there were faint growls of far-off thunder, and great drops of rain beginning to fall.

"The shower will be heavy when it comes," said Mr. Forbes; and at that moment I caught

sight of a lady coming quickly towards us : it was his daughter Helen in the brown silk dress, Paisley shawl, and beaver hat, which formed her sober out-door dress. One would have taken her for a maiden of fifty but for the rapid step and brightly-tinged cheek with which she came to meet her father. Miss Forbes was certainly looking better of late. What an advantage the heightened colour was to her thin face ! how much of the primness and precision had the evening wind and the coming shower taken off ! and with what a kindly glance and smile she came up to us !

“Gude lass, you will get a wet shawl by meeting me this evening,” said her father, clasping her one hand while I shook the other and hoped Miss Forbes was well.

Just at that moment my ear caught the sound of coming hoofs ; and riding at full speed to escape the thunder shower, but still alone, Madame Palivez swept past us like the very wind. We every one looked at her till she was out of sight. I could not help it, though she never looked at me—never seemed to notice that there was any one on the road.

“How well she rides ! how grand and hand

some she is!" said Helen, a glow of enthusiastic admiration lighting up her whole face.

"She is handsome, and she rides well," said Forbes, with a long look after the disappearing habit; "yet it strikes me that woman has had her troubles. We are born to them as the sparks fly upward, and the worst are those we make for ourselves. But Helen will be drowned," he continued, as the rain came down faster, and was driven upon us by rising gusts from the west.

"Come home with me," said I, drawing Helen's arm within my own, for the wind seemed to whistle through her thin form, and threaten to take her shawl away; "we shall reach the house in five minutes; there will be shelter there, and something to warm us, I'll be bound."

It was no time for parley or consideration; the storm was up in its fury. I kept fast hold of Helen; held down her shawl; saved her hat with my handkerchief; and, thanks to Rhoda's haste in opening the door, we three got in with little damage. Rhoda was in a great fluster—I thought at the sight of the unexpected company, but a second look showed me that something still more unusual had occurred.

“What is it, Rhoda?” said I, as soon as we got into the parlour, knowing that everybody saw it as well as myself.

“It is blood money!” cried Miss Livey, entering in such a state of excitement that she neither saw nor heeded the strangers—“blood money! but I’ll never touch a farthing of it. You young folks may do as you please. You are past my advising, with your love of fashions and finery. If you get money for them, you don’t care how it comes; but I’ll neither eat nor drink the price of Raymond’s blood.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS FORBES WILL BE AN HEIRESS.

STARTLED by the energy of Miss Livey, we turned towards her, but even as she spoke a flash of forked lightning shone in among us, filling the room with fire, and a peal of thunder right overhead made the house shake to its foundations. I heard something fall heavily, but my eyes were dazzled into momentary blindness by the glare. Then the screams of Hannah Clark, who had followed her mistress, brought me to my senses, and I saw it was Mr. Forbes.

I ran and lifted him up—he was a light weight for so large a man—and placed him on the sofa, with a fearful impression that the lightning had struck him on account of a steel watch-guard he wore. His face had taken that blue paleness said to come with deadly fear or cold,

but the steel chain was untouched, and before I had well got him up, he opened his eyes.

Poor Helen was by his side. What sense and presence of mind the quiet girl showed in that sudden trial! She had been the first to rush to her father; helped me to raise him without noise or exclamation, and now, as he returned to consciousness, almost pushed me away; threw her thin arms about him; laid his head on her breast, and said in a low, tender tone—"Dear father, can you speak? are you hurt?"

"I am not, Helen. But what was it that came into the room? did you see it?" and he shook all over as if with sudden palsy.

"It was a terrible flash of lightning, father; did it strike you?"

"No, dear; but I am getting old and weakly. I suppose it must have been an electric shock. Stop, Lucien!" continued the strong-minded man of the North, raising himself as he saw me starting off for a doctor; "there is no want of medical aid, except for your aunt there. What is the matter, Miss Livey?"

His words directed my attention to the poor old woman, who leant against the opposite wall, gazing vacantly on us like one really thunder-

struck, while Rhoda stood hiding her head in the corner where she had taken refuge, and Hannah Clark renewed her screams behind the door. There was but one way to manage Hannah in that state of excitement. I pushed her out, shut the door upon her, and not seeing the agitation of others, she settled into silence in the passage, sitting down on the stair, and covering her eyes with her hands. I sat my aunt down on a chair too. She drew a long breath, uttered a pious ejaculation or two, and we saw that Miss Livey had only got a terrible fright. Rhoda came out of her corner; Mr. Forbes became himself again. He and his daughter repeated a brief thanksgiving with bowed heads and clasped hands. The lightning flashes became less fierce and frequent; the thunder rolled away eastward to frighten people in London, and I gathered sufficient composure to say—"Now, Rhoda, since we have all heard something of it, tell me what has happened to trouble my aunt so."

"I am sure it is not bad news, Lucien, though we don't understand it, but you will. Here is the lawyer's letter;" and she brought from the mantelpiece, where it had lain unnoticed, a large, legal-looking epistle addressed

to Miss Olivia La Touche, by Messrs. Kelly and Carson, solicitors, Four Courts Alley, Dublin, informing her with lawyer-like precision and brevity that an annuity of two hundred per annum had been purchased for herself and her niece, Miss Rhoda La Touche, during their joint lives, the whole to be enjoyed by the survivor, and to be paid quarterly through their firm. Messrs. Kelly and Carson further declared themselves to be unacquainted with the name of the purchaser, and professed their readiness to send the requisite documents when they heard from Miss La Touche.

I read that communication with feelings I could never describe. It was no hoax, no practical joke, dry and silly as such things generally are. The name and style of Kelly and Carson were well known to me. They were one of the oldest and most respectable firms in Dublin—had done legal business for my father as well as for my uncle. Miss Livey and my sister were provided for, safe from want and dependence, whatever became of me; but who had done the gracious thing? I did not know my eyes had turned that way as I lifted them from the letter, but Mr. Forbes, looking as much surprised as myself, for I had read it aloud, said—"No,

Lucien, I solemnly declare to you and your family, I have no hand in this business, and know nothing of it, though it is one which no man would disown. Some friend of your father's—somebody of the many he helped in their adversity—has remembered his child and father's sister. May the Lord remember it to them, whatever be their motive for concealment!"

"Amen," said I. "Rhoda, my girl, you were right; it is good news for us all. Aunt, dear, why do you trouble yourself with such foolish notions? the money comes from some kind friend, who does not wish to be known, lest it might look like charity. At all events, Rhoda and you are provided for, and you ought to be thankful."

"Maybe I ought, Lucien," said poor Miss Livey—that lightning flash had worked wonders on her temper, which thus came in contact with a fire fiercer than its own—"maybe I ought; money is a good thing with God's blessing, no matter who sends it. Rhoda will be provided for. There is no use in talking of me, for I won't want provision long in this world. Oh, but it is the troublesome place, and full of strange happenings; but I am an old woman,

and that thunder has shaken my head. I'll go and lie down, and you can settle all about the money among yourselves."

So Rhoda helped her upstairs, and we sat talking over the news, good and strange as it was. Mr. Forbes was now composed and serious as ever. He soberly congratulated me, in a manner which seemed conclusive regarding his having no previous knowledge of the transaction; what I knew of the man also convinced me that he would not make a solemn and unrequited declaration, except it were strictly true. Helen was even warmer in her congratulations, though the poor girl still looked pale and troubled about her father. He seemed in haste to go. Now that the rain had spent itself, and the sky was clearing fast, no entreaties of mine could make him stay or take any refreshment. "We will go home to dinner," said he; "the air is cool and fresh now after the rain; it will blow the fright and confusion off us; and though the road is wet, both Helen and I wear thick shoes."

Away they went down the deep-running road; Helen looked back at me with a kindly smile as I watched them from the door through the deepening twilight, filled with the scents

that rise in rural places after summer rain ; and when they were fairly out of sight, I stood there still—till Rhoda crept out to my side, laid her hand on my shoulder, looked up with her rosy face full of contented joy, and said—“ Now, Lucien dear, you will have no more burden of us—all your earnings will be your own ; you can marry Rosanna, and bring her home. We can soon get another house, if she don’t like us to live here ; though I would rather stay, if my aunt and her could agree, and she could take with poor Hannah—for in course we’ll keep her.”

“ Do you know that Rosanna has come from America with her sister and brother, and they are living in London ?”

I had no difficulty in telling my sister, now that it involved no fears for herself.

“ No, Lucien ; how could I, when you did not tell me ?”

“ I did not know myself till one day last week ; but there they are, and we shall have an opportunity of seeing whether my aunt and Rosanna could agree or not.”

“ Maybe they would,” said Rhoda ; “ but I am glad you told me the Joyces was come ; I’ll always know where you be, Lucien, when

you stay out late on Saturday evenings, and the Forbes' send their servant to look for you."

I recognised the full value of the insinuation, but turned my honest sister off with—"So you would like to stay with me, Rhoda?—all your life, is it, or only till you see somebody you will like better?"

"I'll never see one I'll like better than you, Lucien; you are all the brother I have. Many a time, when you were in America, and I sat spinning at the lead window of our back room over yonder in Ireland—I wonder if Jenny Short has got a glass one put in, as she said she would when our tails was turned—many a time, when I sat there, and heard the great sighing of the sea coming up, through the long quiet days, I thought how wide it was between us, and minded the summer times long ago, when we used to play together all by ourselves, building houses at the foot of the woodbine wall, and gathering moss to make carpets for them off the old apple-trees in our father's garden in Armagh. When the rest went from me, one by one, I never missed them as much as I did you. And yet how strange you looked to me that night on the quay, Lucien! but that has wore off, and I mind on the old play-times still when you are

out at the bank ; it just keeps me from hearing my aunt grumbling. Howsomever, she is getting over that uncommonly. I think Rosanna will be able to stand her ; but, goodness me ! what could have put that in her head about the money, Lucien ?—and what do you think came over Mr. Forbes ?”

“An electric shock, I think.”

“Some stroke of the lightning. Well, maybe it was ; nobody never saw such a flash. I got a glimpse of his face out of that corner, Lucien, and, though I never saw the like, thank God, it looked to me just what one might be that had died of fright.”

“I think the flash did frighten him more than he cared to acknowledge. Mr. Forbes is not a strong man. But as for aunt’s notions about the money, there is no use in minding them ; it has come from some friend of our father—somebody that owed him, perhaps, more than we know of, and had a right to remember you and Miss Livey for his sake ; depend on it we will find that out in time.”

“Would it be the great bank lady you found the ring for ?” She had hit on a supposition which occurred to my own mind, on stronger grounds than Rhoda was aware of, but had been

discarded more than once. Why should the business be done through a Dublin solicitor? Madame Palivez had a London firm in regular employment ever since the bank was established in Old Broad-street; it was not likely that she would take such a mode of rewarding me, after what had passed between us; and though I reasoned the impression away, it always returned upon me that there was some truth in my poor aunt's unaccountable conclusion, and that the mysteriously purchased annuity had something to do with my lost brother—perhaps, indeed, the result of his late repentance, if he had really been the sinner we took him for.

“That would be a good price for a ring, Rhoda,” I said, as she repeated the question, and I had thought over it for at least the seventh time.

“So it would, and it's to yourself she would give it, not to us; in course she don't know that the like of us is living, but I know she'll do something for you yet, Lucien. Is not Miss Forbes the nice young lady—not handsome to be sure, but so good to everybody, and not a bit of pride about her? she comes here and speaks to Hannah and me, wanting me to teach her the Bible, which can't be done nohow, that

I am able to think on, but it's very good of Miss Forbes, Lucien ; I would rather have her than that bank lady."

"What do you know of the bank lady, Rhoda?" The gathering darkness kept her from seeing my surprise.

"Well, nothing ; but I see her riding by here, and away through the fields. I am sure she looks at our house every time she passes, and once I saw her looking at me so mighty sharp, that I was ashamed and left the window."

"Perhaps you were taking too much notice of her, Rhoda ; Madame Palivez is a great lady, of immense wealth, and in the first society ; the Prince Regent invites her to Carlton House ; he and all the foreign ambassadors and people of fashion go to the grand balls and parties she gives at her mansion in Mayfair ; I have seen the street in front of it quite filled with their carriages ; and if she rides about the country alone, it is for her own whim or fancy ; Madame might have half-a-dozen grooms after her, if she pleased."

"Oh ! I know she is very high and grand, and I am sure I didn't look at her too forward or curious-like ; but one can't help looking at her, Lucien, she is so uncommon, and handsome

too ; but she is proud, Lucien ; it is in her eye and in her air, and I would rather have Miss Forbes."


"Miss Forbes is a very good, very kind lady, and has a fine cousin, a young naval officer, who comes there when his ship is in port, and Miss Forbes will be an heiress."

"Oh, no doubt, and heiresses always gets young men enough ; but I am sure I wish her a good one," said Rhoda, with a half sigh.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONFERENCE.

HOURS after all the household were in bed, I lay awake, thinking of the events of the day and the talk with my sister. It was true what she said: I might marry Rosanna, and bring her home now without compunction or fear of the future. Rhoda and Miss Livey were independent of me; but would it be kind to send them from me in the strange country—strange to them as any corner of the world could be—now, when we had learned and become reconciled to each other's ways? My only sister, whose memory clung so fondly to our early play times, between whom and me affection and confidence were growing up from the old roots, as wild flowers come when the winters are over—my poor old grand-aunt, who had by this time grown at home in my house as she was not likely to do in another, for the lightning had shown me how far her



sands had run—would it be kindly, would it be wise to move them to another home, perhaps by way of making room for Sally Joyce and Jeremy? The terrors of that succession had haunted me at intervals ever since my engagement with Rosanna had been formed. There are no barriers against relations in law so sure as born kindred. Would it not be prudent, and one's duty to wait for some time, get them gradually introduced, and see if Rosanna and Miss Livey could agree? I knew Rhoda would agree with anybody; and it might be well to find out what brought the Joyces from America.

They could know nothing of the Dublin lawyer's letter; there was nothing to hinder me from keeping it judiciously to myself. I felt inclined to that course from other motives not so easily put in words. By whomsoever that annuity had been purchased, the moving cause concerned my lost brother. That was a conviction which I could neither establish satisfactorily nor reason away. The Joyces would come to the same conclusion; and it would be no easy task to hear Sally on the subject. How had that boy become the spectre of our house, haunting the last of us through strange lands and altered fortunes, one of the black shadows

of which Madame Palivez had spoken ! My thoughts reverted to her from every topic and channel.

I had heard nothing of or from her since the day she chose me for her friend, and made that queer compact with me—seen nothing except the flash of her diamonds going to Carlton House, and the flutter of her green habit when she swept past me, without glance or sign of recognition, on the road to her villa. Yet Rhoda saw her pass the house and look keenly at its windows ; her inquiring glances had frightened my sister from the post of observation, and Rhoda had an abiding conviction of her pride and haughtiness. Perhaps the girl was right ; yet what cause had I to wonder or be displeased ? Was not Madame's whole course of a piece with the terms on which she offered, and I accepted, friendship ? was she not still the great lady, and I the humble clerk ? Were we—could we be friends long, or really, on such terms ? I had accepted and could not change them ; had it been in my power, I could not for my very soul have told what change I should make.

In the meantime, what ought I to do ? Did she expect me to go and visit her unsent for,

by that private door in the churchyard wall? She had not told me so; but I knew Madame did not. Should I find my way to her villa? She might not be there—she might not want me. How did I know what kind of an establishment she pleased to keep in that hermitage? and with the thought there came a sudden memory of the wild, ragged man, with his long knife and fierce growl about somebody that had been murdered; and then, by an instinct of the mind which I cannot explain, my suspicion of her fearing Esthers, and the tale of his being her cousin, crossed me, and again I asked myself the question—was my grand-aunt and sister's annuity purchased with the notes of the Palivez bank?

The days that followed that of the thunder-storm must have been long, bright, midsummer ones, but they have grown dim and confused in my recollection, for the thoughts thus sketched went with me through their work and play—if one ever gets the latter after childhood. I remember writing to Messrs. Kelly and Carson a grateful acceptance of the two hundred per annum, in Miss Livey and Rhoda's names; I remember observing how quiet and thoughtful my grand-aunt had grown, as if the sight of

that terrible flash which struck down the strong man in her presence was still upon her. She rose late next day—according to Rhoda's report—gave no bother at all, sat spinning slowly in her accustomed corner, welcomed me kindly, and without a grumble, when I came home from the bank, and began to take more than usual to her rosary.

I remember walking slowly home that Saturday evening, assuring myself I would be in good enough time for going to the Forbes', and looking round at the most distant sound of a horse's hoof. Nobody but old gentlemen riding home to dinner at their country houses passed me; but as I approached the very spot where Madame Palivez first stopped and talked to me about her signet-ring, there was a lady evidently awaiting my approach. It was not a green habit, but a Paisley shawl she wore; and I quickened my pace to salute Miss Forbes.

"Oh, Mr. La Touche, I have been wishing for an opportunity to thank you for your care and kindness to my father in that terrible storm," she said, when we had a friendly shake-hands, and the tears were coming into her soft, earnest eyes.

"I expect and deserve no thanks for anything I shall ever be able to do in your father's service, Miss Forbes; and I only hope that Providence will one day put it in my power to acknowledge the deep debt of gratitude which I and my family owe to him."

"Oh, my father does not consider you his debtor at all; he is always happy when he can do anything for anybody; and your father and he were old friends, were they not?" How well and easily she spoke on the subject!

"Mr. Forbes was the only friend my father had in his sore adversity; when those he had associated with and served in his prosperous days stood aloof or turned their backs on him, your father came forward, like a generous man and a true Christian as he is, assisted, cheered, and did the last offices of friendship for him. Oh, Miss Forbes, I can never forget, never repay that obligation, if it were the only one he had conferred on me and mine."

"You are very good to think and speak so well of him; I know it is partly justice, though my father never will let his good deeds be spoken of, especially those you have mentioned. Sometimes I wish he did not think quite so humbly of himself; but no doubt it is his stronger faith and clearer

knowledge which teach him that humility I have yet to learn ; but if you knew him as I do, Mr. La Touche, though it may look vain and foolish for me to say so, you would believe that, if there was ever a saint on earth, he must be one—so righteous, so good, so self-denying, leading such a blameless, pious life, with nothing of the Pharisee in him, and more charitable to every creature than himself.”

While she heard and spoke her father’s praise, Helen’s thin colourless face had been lighted up with a glow of honest pride and affection, that positively made it beautiful ; but when I answered, “ I believe it from my heart, Miss Forbes, and, like you, I sometimes wonder why he so dislikes to hear his good works referred to, particularly by myself, who has most reason to remember them,” the flush suddenly faded, and her eyes drooped, as if with some painful recollection.

“ It is strange,” she said, after a minute’s pause, “ but no doubt he fears the growth of spiritual pride ; it is a rank and insidious weed, as the best divines tell us ; perhaps you don’t read their books, Mr. La Touche?—pardon me, I am forgetting you belong to a different church, and I am forgetting my message too. I have

been at your house, seeing Miss Livey; my father made me promise to go over some time, to-day; you see he had to go to Edinburgh on business this morning, very particular business, I believe, on account of some information Mr. Esthers sent him last night. He says it was the kindest thing in the world, and what nobody could have expected from a Jew. I am sure I never would have expected anything very good from Mr. Esthers, but one is apt to judge uncharitably; I suppose it is a great mistake to estimate people by their looks, and I shall always think better of him for doing such good service to my father."

"I am glad to hear of it, though it is the last thing I would have expected of Esthers either; he certainly has it in his power to send correct and early information to any gentleman in your father's business, if he be only willing; and for my own part, I also shall think better of the manager for serving Mr. Forbes."

There was another reflection arising to my lips—by-the-bye, it had been the first in my mind—to the effect that Esthers was solicitous for the banker's acquaintance as well as that of his daughter, and sincerely envied my intimacy at their house; but the little discretion I had, to-

gether with the dread of appearing envious in my turn, made me change the subject by saying —“ I am rejoiced to hear that your father was well enough to take so long a journey after the shock he suffered.”

“ Oh, it did not injure him at all ; but how very strange that he should have been so struck ? Does it often happen, Mr. La Touche, that people are struck by lightning, and yet escape uninjured ?”

There was something anxious, almost fearful in her look. How much the girl’s serious, solitary life was bound up in the equally lonely and sober one of her father ! She had hit on a query which puzzled myself, and got the only answer I had to give :

“ I am not aware that it often happens ; but the laws of electricity are but imperfectly known to us—at any rate, Mr. Forbes has escaped, and doubtless will have no bad consequences.”

“ I hope not ; he told me he was quite well this morning when we parted, and made me promise to see Miss Livey and tell you that he would be home on Saturday week, and we should expect you in the evening ; perhaps cousin Charles will be up from Portsmouth by that time.”

“ He won’t stay long in Portsmouth while you

are in the neighbourhood of London, I suspect, Miss Forbes."

It was impertinent curiosity mingling with some distant influence of the Blarney Stone that originated that speech, but Helen was not flattered ; on the contrary, she looked a little vexed, and said—

"Oh, you are entirely mistaken ; the consideration of my being in any neighbourhood would weigh very lightly with Charles ; he is my cousin-german, but does not care much for our house or company—he prefers gay life, and finds us rather dull ; but I was going to say, how well Miss Livey had got over the fright—it was only a fright, in her case, I suppose?"

"Nothing more ; she is very old, has seen a great deal of trouble, and her peculiar trials have made her a little odd."

"So they do make most of us," said Helen, sighing, and looking as if she, too, were above seventy. "Miss Livey did not understand the lawyer's letter, you see, and it disturbed her ; I think she does not quite understand it yet ; but your sister does—what a good sensible girl she is, and what a blessing she may be to you, Mr. La Touche ; so dutiful to her grand-aunt, and so good to poor Hannah Clark ; perhaps it is tak-

ing a great liberty, but I do wish you and she would try to teach that poor girl some of the things that belong to eternity ; but I am keeping you standing here, and I know you want to go home."

"No, indeed, Miss Forbes ; but the dew is falling—won't you come back to the house with me and take tea?"

"Oh, dear no, I am very much obliged, but I always like to be at home when my father is absent. I will come over and see Miss Livey some time soon, and talk to your sister about Hannah, if she will let me."

"My sister will be glad to hear you talk about anything, and so shall we all, Miss Forbes ; but allow me to see you home?"

"Oh, not for the world ; you must be tired with the long day in the bank, I am sure, and it is not late ; I could not think of giving you so much trouble."

"No trouble at all," said I, drawing her arm within mine, for she was now going, and there was gentleman's duty to be done—not to speak of her being Mr. Forbes' daughter.

Helen looked pleased and flattered for the first time in all our acquaintance, reminding me of Rosanna, and as we walked on talking,

not as Rosanna and I used to do, but concerning my grand-aunt's age and fright; the merciful dispensation of Providence by which she and Rhoda were provided for; the praises of the latter, which my heart echoed, every word; and the duty and necessity of instructing Hannah Clark.

When we reached Notting Hill House, I knew it was proper to take my leave. Helen was far too prudent to ask a gentleman in while her father was absent, but she lingered with me at the gate before pulling the bell, glanced along the road, and said:

"That's the way Madame Palivez rides home to her villa, but I have not seen her to-day. Mr. Esthers said in his note to papa she was so occupied with a friend of hers—I forget his name, but he is a Russian prince—that she stays mostly at the West-end; but good-bye, I have detained you shamefully; if my father were at home I am sure he would scold me."

I made my declarations of being pleased and honoured, and still blaming herself, but with a brighter smile and lighter step than ever I imagined she could exhibit, Helen left me at the open gate and tripped into the house.

Far down the avenue of trees and along the open road I looked back—it was the villa way—but my eye also caught Mr. Forbes' bay-window; somebody was standing there, half hidden by the curtain, but the head was turned towards me, and I knew the banker's daughter was seeing me home.

What of that? Miss Forbes had a way of looking after people, it was her only amusement. Church-going and good books, needle-work and visiting the poor, could fill up nobody's life. It was out of that very window she watched Madame Palivez. How much more information concerning her would Esthers be able to give, now that he had made good his footing in Notting Hill House. There was a long-desired object attained at last, and Esthers had shown his discernment by taking the most direct way to it. Ordinary people may be won by flattery or attentions; prudent ones can be bought only by serving their interests.

CHAPTER XX.

POOR MISS LIVEY.

THE important information which sent Mr. Forbes off to Edinburgh that Saturday morning was made clear to my understanding some three weeks after, when the Lothian bank suddenly stopped payment, and all who had transactions with that long-established house were serious losers, except himself. I knew the prudent banker well enough—while only guessing it must be something of the kind—to believe that solid, useful service done to his business must secure Esthers a high place in his good graces. I also observed that the manager intended to stand well with his daughter. He had particulars of the lady-superior to communicate for her edification, which were carefully kept from my ears. I had never heard a syllable about

the Russian prince, though Esthers' civility to me seemed to increase hourly. His private reasons for that silence I could not yet fathom, but the motive of his communications was plain.

In Helen's admiring interest in Madame Palivez and her doings, as sincere as it was undisguised, there appeared to me the one touch of romance in her quiet and methodical life; it was so unlike what might have been expected from her opposite nature and habits—such a contradiction of the world's report regarding the hostility of plain women to handsome ones. I marvelled at, I half admired her for it; and friendly as we were, it was the only sentiment of hers in which I had any sympathy.

Esthers had found it out—the powers of plotting best know how—and meant to make it a fulcrum for his lever wherewith to move the heart of Miss Forbes. Yes, that was his drift or design. There was a smirking smile got up whenever her name happened to be mentioned—a familiar tone assumed in his enquiries after the young lady's welfare—which had become frequent of late.

The manager seemed to have forgiven my

goings to Notting Hill House, and condescended to converse with me about the Forbes' family as our mutual friends. He had made good his entrance, and he was an able general.

Moreover, there was every inducement to employ his powers. Helen was her father's only heiress. The mercantile wealth and status on which Esthers' heart and hopes were set might be achieved through her, and I had no doubt of him playing his cards well; but there was that in Helen's look when we sat together at the bay window, and her pale cheek flushed as she blamed herself for not liking the manager—ay, and that very evening, when she promised to think better of him for serving her father, there was that which assured me that on her gentle, pious, upright nature, the best-laid scheme or acted part could have no power. For all his cunning, Esthers was not the man to win the Scotch banker's heiress. Helen never could like him, for all his news and service; but her talk, quiet as it was, always did me a sort of spiritual good. What ought to be done was apt to come into my mind on such occasions; and when I had seen that all was right at home, it sent me to see Rosanna.

I went wondering who the Russian prince was, or if Esthers had coined that piece of gossip, having none else to tell; and I found myself once more in Curzon-street, opposite Madame's house. It was lighted up for another gala—not a ball this time; there were fewer carriages, fewer gazers; and I learned, from the passing discourse of an orange girl and a pastry-cook's boy, that Madame was giving a select dinner-party. The study and worship of high life go down to every grade of the West-end; the costermongers and street-boys around me were familiar with the names and titles of the arriving company. I stood there waiting for the mention of the Russian prince, looking out for any individual who might be his Northern highness: but I saw nothing of the kind. There were turbaned dowagers and old officers with ribbons and stars; and when the door was finally shut, and the last carriage driven away, I walked into Bolton-row.

The slatternly maid admitted me as usual, but she was in haste to answer an impatient bell; and I was making my own way to the attic, though it was getting dark by this time, and the solitary lamp was not yet lighted, when almost at the top a man's voice reached me from

the Joyces' rooms; it was not Jeremy's subdued tone. I stopped short, and the next moment saw Rosanna rushing down.

"Is it you, Lucien dear?" she said, in a frightened whisper (how keen the poor girl's ear had grown regarding my voice and step!) "Don't come up, for goodness sake! Sally is in a fit—the worst one ever she had, and if she sees you it will make her ten times worsen. That notion about us not getting married soon enough runs in her head so. Oh, Lucien! she gives Jeremy and me no life at all;" and Rosanna began to sob at the foot of the third flight, to which we had now got down.

"Don't vex yourself, Rosanna," said I; "perhaps we may get married sooner than Sally thinks." Nothing but my prudent resolution touching the introduction of her and Miss Livey kept me from telling her the good news on the spot. "But why did she work herself into a fit this evening? And is that a doctor I hear talking in your room?"

"Oh, yes—we had to send for one," said Rosanna, already giving up her sobs. "But why do you think we will get settled so soon? Have you got a better situation, or somebody to take your aunt and sister? for goodness sake

do tell me, my own dear, darling Lucien ; I haven't a minute to stay, for if she knew you were here, the house would not hold her."

" Well, Rosanna, don't stay, I'll tell you all some other time, when Sally is better."

" Oh ! she will be well enough on Monday evening, I am sure ; but can't you tell me now ?"

" No, Rosanna, I cannot ; but I'll come and see you on Monday evening. Good night ; be a good girl, and don't vex yourself whatever Sally says. We will be happy yet."

" Oh ! I'll go down with you to the door. It is such a pleasure to see you for a minute longer, my own dear Lucien ;" she clung to my arm. How hard it was to hold on my prudent course ; but it was for the best, and all should be made up to her hereafter. We went down the dark stairs in kindly company. She promised not to grieve ; said she could trust me to the world's end ; her Lucien never would forsake her. We had our tender leave-taking in the passage, which happened to be left to ourselves.

I heard the doctor's tones rising louder above, and it struck me as something strange that there was laughter mingling with them. Per-

haps the medical man was not particular in an attic. I promised to come back punctually on Monday evening; promised to be always faithful, ay, and intended it; yet felt relieved when fairly under the street lamps.

On the following Sunday it was my duty to escort my grand-aunt and sister on an invitation which had been long pending to the house of the Masons, Watt Wilson's relations.

Honest people, they lived in Brook Green-lane, Hammersmith, then a pretty street of small, new houses, running out into the common, but now gone down considerably in appearance and respectability. The head of the house and husband of Watt's sister was a clerk like myself, not indeed in a bank, but in a mercantile house. His salary was as large as mine; his responsibilities were not much greater, though he had six young children, but Wilson had impressed the ancient descent and grandeur of the La Touches of Armagh so deeply on the family mind, that from the father to the baby in long clothes, every one of the Masons revered us, and put forth all their resources of fare and manners for our suitable entertainment. The hard-working, well-doing pair and their

six little ones have no place in this story of mine.

They were the only society my grand-aunt and sister had : useful and safe acquaintances, friends as the world goes. I valued them as such, and made myself at home with them for the time. Our association was long and familiar, cemented by good offices on either side, and with nothing hard or unpleasant to look back on ; but of that particular Sunday afternoon spent under their hospitable roof, I remember chiefly my own deep disgust at the necessary accompaniments of family life, with a narrow income and an increasing household.

The crying baby, for whom there was no distant nursery ; the larger and more troublesome children, in evident want of a governess ; the absence of elegance and taste ; the number crowded up in such small spaces, jarred on my mind as they had never done before, and at the same time I recollected that with such means Mason could do no better, and neither could I, if in his circumstances.

Was that the prospect before me and Rosanna ? was that the home we had to expect ?

I knew she would never be such a manager

as Mason's wife. I knew that Jeremy, Sally, and the fits, were always to be seen in the background, if not in our very front, and I inwardly rejoiced at the prudent reserve which at least insured me a respite from such penalties. I remember Watt Wilson doing the honours. He was the director of that house, the Masons being only managers under him, in right of his bachelorhood, and the savings once placed at my disposal. Miss Livey had always liked him ; he was the last link to her former life, country, and associations, now within the old woman's reach. Our expedition to his sister's house had been undertaken partly to cheer her up from that unnatural quiet, superinduced, as we thought, by the fright in the thunder-storm. Wilson was aware of that. He talked to her of the old times that were still good in her memory ; of the Easters and Christmases kept in Armagh, when our house was yet unscathed by misfortune, and she was its manager.

For once since her coming to London, all that had come and gone since then seemed to slip away from Miss Livey's mind ; her old face brightened up till it almost lost the wrinkles of nearly four-score years, with the recollections of jokes and merry-makings, and friends that had

long gone the way of the roses. I had never seen her so blithe and bright since the spring-time of my seventh year.

Wilson vowed she was growing young again. The honest fellow would see us home; as he remarked, there was some walking to do. The London and Hammersmith coach set us down at Church-street, one of the outlying arms at Kensington, from whence, by cross ways, we got to Petersburg-place.

"Take my arm, Miss Livey," said Wilson, as he helped her out of the coach. "Let these young folks run on before us, they don't mind as much as you and I do."

"Thank you, Watt, thank you; but if it is all the same to him, I would rather take Lucien's arm. Many a time he has helped me over this rough road; maybe it isn't so rough, neither, only I think it, as I did many a thing. Oh! but this world is deceiving. That's it Lucien, my boy," she continued, as I drew her arm into mine, "many a time you helped me along, but this is the last of it."

"Nonsense, aunt," said I, "we will walk here many a day to see the Masons, and home again."

"I don't think it, Lucien. Something tells

me my time is nearly come. I haven't felt so light of heart and cheerful these twenty years. It is just as if nothing at all had happened, though I know it has, and more than ever I knew before; but we won't talk of that. The Lord will bring it all to light in His good time, which won't be within my day, and how should it? I have lived to see my youngest grand-nephew a tall, handsome man, the image of his father. I hope you'll be as good, and have better luck, Lucien. You have been a good boy to us, and you'll get a blessing for it. You and Rhoda are the last of them all—the family I saw so many and merry. I wake out of sleep here in the long nights with the voices of the children ringing in my ears, as they rang through the old house before trouble came. You and Rhoda are the last of them, and you will be kind to one another when I am dead and gone.”

“Aunt, dear,” cried Rhoda, “you are not going to die!” Wilson and I broke in with a similar remonstrance. It was strange to hear Miss Livey talk so on that sweet summer evening, when the trees were full of leaves, and the sky in the flush of sunset. The thought of her departure had never come to me as a grief till then; the old woman seemed so wise,

so amiable, so sorely tired, so underrated—my heart smote me for my own share in the last-mentioned. I made good resolutions for time to come, and declared, in chorus with Wilson and Rhoda, that she would live and walk with us for many a year.

“I know better, children, and the Lord’s will be done! Long life is not a desirable thing; you’ll think so, when you come to know it as I do. I remember saying so to your poor sisters when they were going; but not one of them would believe me. Oh, but this world is deceiving, and a poor place to fix our minds on, with its falsehoods and its changes; there is nothing certain but the sky above and the grave below, children—the grass must be long and green over them this summer, as it grows over all the dead; but up there,” and she pointed to the sky, “what a place it must be above the sun and moon, the clouds and the troubles!—but, dear me, is this our house? It looks prettier than ever I thought it before;” and Miss Livey stepped cheerfully in.

We had left Hannah Clark at home, somewhat against Rhoda’s mind; her peculiar mode of conversation offended my gentility, and would not have conduced to the quiet of the Masons’

house. I had therefore installed, by way of caretaker and company, a certain honest charwoman, of Miss Forbes' recommending, who had been employed about No. 9 since our settlement there, was known to be sober and steady—having a husband of the contrary kind and three small children to keep—and her name was Mrs. Muncy.

When Hannah opened the door to us with accustomed demonstrations, and the good woman stood waiting in the passage till they subsided, I knew she had something to say.

"What is it, Mrs. Muncy?" said I, as soon as hearing could be obtained.

"If you please, sir, there has been a gentleman here, about an hour after you went, inquiring in the kindest manner for all the family, and yourself particularly."

"Did he leave his name or card?"

"No, sir, nothing of the kind, though I axed him two or three times, saying how disappointed you would be; but he said he would call again, and discoursed—I mean, made a deal of signs with his face and fingers—to Hannah. I am sure she understood him, for you never heard or saw how she went on answering like; but I couldn't make out a notion of what he was say-

ing, though I should have liked to," says Mrs. Muncy, twisting her apron-string.

"What was he like?" said I, in hopes of knowing my visitor by description. But, gracious reader, did you ever try how many ordinary people could describe either a person or place so as to let you know one from another?

"Well, sir, he was like a gentleman," said Mrs. Muncy, twisting away.

"What had he on?"

"A coat and a hat, sir."

"Was he tall?"

"Not very tall, sir."

"Was he little?"

"Not very little, sir."

"What sort of a face had he?"

"A middling nice face." At this point I gave up in despair; but Rhoda having taken Hannah in hand in the kitchen, now came to my assistance with, "Hannah says it was the priest."

"Well, maybe it wor a Catholic clergyman," said Mrs. Muncy, who happened to be a sound Protestant; "you knows best, Miss, and so does Hannah; but he didn't look very like it to me. Howsomever, I did all I could with him to leave his name, and when he calls again you'll see him yourselves."


"Don't you think Father Connolly would have left his name, Rhoda?" said I, when we were in the parlour and the charwoman out of hearing—our parish priest did visit us sometimes, though never before on Sunday; and Mrs. Muncy's declaration that the visitor did not look like a Catholic clergyman weighed on my mind, and I could not help adding, "Are you sure Hannah tells the truth?"

"I never knowed her to tell stories, and I am sure she knows Father Connolly; he might have been coming to see after Miss Livey, Sunday as it is. It was queer of him not to leave his name; but he'll come some day next week, I'll warrant. I never thought Father Connolly could sign and talk to Hannah; the last time he was here he did not understand a word she said; but is it not the good thing, Lucien? He'll be able to teach her all that Miss Forbes wants me to do, and I am sure I can't, let me try ever so. But, goodness me, my aunt's away upstairs herself, and hasn't nobody to help off with her bonnet," said Rhoda, as she left me to my meditations.

Perhaps it was Father Connolly, and no doubt he would call again to give Hannah religious instruction, to which the good priest had pro-

bably found some key, for he was a laborious and devoted pastor, according to his creed, with a large and poor parish, his part of which consisted chiefly of emigrant Irish. By the way, he was one of them, as his name imported; and though not from our part of Ulster, his native place was Donegal Bay, I believe; he knew our family history, and paid us particular attention. I had come to the conclusion that he must have been our visitor, after canvassing the subject more than it seemed worth, when I entered the manager's office on Monday morning, and started back involuntarily, as in Esthers' place, and manifestly looking over his book, I beheld Madame Palivez.

"Good morning, Mr. La Touche," she said, with the tone and manner of the bank lady; "do you know if Mr. Esthers be within? I know he is not," she continued, when I had made my bow, stammered out something in reply which was never clear to my mind, and shut the door. "He goes to see a friend of his on Sunday afternoon, at least he went yesterday, and has not got back; the way is rather long. And now, young man, I don't know whether I ought to shake hands with you or not;" she extended her white hand as she spoke, and looked exactly as



she did when asking me to stay and dine with her. "How comes it, after making a league of friendship—an alliance offensive and defensive, as one may say, against the world—that you have never appeared at my back rooms in the bank, or my hermitage in the Park?" We were shaking hands still, and I could get out nothing but "Madame, you did not send for me."

"Do you wait to be sent for?" said she, laughing; "that may be friendship in this age and country, but it would not have passed for such in our ancient Greece."

"Madame, you will excuse me;" I felt myself wronged and misjudged, yet how hard it was to put the case in words—to express my own feelings on the subject.

"Perhaps I will; what is your excuse?" she said; "we were to be friends without pride or misunderstanding."

"I did not like to trespass upon you when you might have been otherwise engaged; our positions—what you very properly call our public lives—are so different. I was aware, though merely from appearances about your house in Curzon-street, which I sometimes pass, that you were much occupied with company, as most fashionable people are at this period of

the London season"—she was positively looking embarrassed, and that gave me courage to proceed—"I thought that when you wished to see me you would let me know, as you had the goodness to do before; and I thought it better to wait."

"You are more prudent than I am," she said, the embarrassment deepening into vexation; had the incompatibility of things at length occurred to her also? "but listen, we cannot talk here, you will come and see me at my hermitage in the Park this evening; there will be time enough after the bank closes; the way lies up by the stream and through the trees, you remember, and cannot miss it if you only keep to the left and follow its windings. Look at this, too," and she drew from her pocket a small brass key, of old-fashioned but strong workmanship, "a proof that I will not be the first to break our compact; take and keep it, it will admit you to my back rooms by the door in the churchyard wall, to my hermitage by the only gate it has: Calixi or any of my servants will tell you where I am, and, by the honour of old Greece, there will never be a 'not at home,' to you. Good-bye for the present." She shook hands with me once more, and left the

key in my fingers ; “ you will come this evening ? ”

“ If I am alive, Madame.” How was it that the promise to Rosanna passed out of my memory for the time ?

She had stepped to the door and opened it before the words were well out, and with a formal “ Good morning, Mr. La Touche,” which would have edified any clerk within hearing, swept along the passage, and I heard the inside key turned in her door of retreat.

END OF VOL. I.

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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates.



